

SEEING MANY IN OUR MIRRORS: A MODEL FOR TRANSFORMING
HIGH STEEPLE CHURCHES INTO COMMUNITY
REVITALIZATION CENTERS

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2019

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ABSTRACT

SEEING MANY IN OUR MIRRORS: A MODEL FOR TRANSFORMING HIGH STEEPLE CHURCHES INTO COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION CENTERS

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The context of this project was Union Memorial United Methodist Church in Baltimore, Maryland. The purpose of this project was to establish a model for transforming churches that were lacking in their ability to meaningfully connect with their neighbors into community revitalization centers. I believed that if members of both entities fully participated during the learning process and meaningfully engaged with each other during intentional opportunities for collaboration, then a greater awareness between the two groups would arise and a practice of Beloved Community would be established. This ultimately occurred through the planning and implementation of the Harlem Renaissance Project. A qualitative research approach was used throughout this project, which included group facilitations, surveys, one-on-one sessions and informal conversations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the gracious invitation to embrace the totality of Dr. King's life and work by my mentor, Dr. C. Anthony Hunt, a renowned scholar wise beyond his years, who skillfully challenged my thinking and deepened my desire to "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly before God".

I am grateful for the opportunity to have walked this journey as founding member of the Enacting Martin Luther King Jr. and the Beloved Community Cohort with three incredible theologians, William Butler, Bryan Fleet, Aaron Saari, whose passion for seeing meaningful community realized in every assembly gave me something to strive for at every turn and served as sources of consistent support and encouragement along the way. I am also thankful for the intense, conscientious dialogue that pushed my project to explore uncharted and unexpected territory by the other members of our cohort: Angelle Jones, Cheryl Coleman-Hall, Twanda Prioleau, Dana Jones and Joseph Chandler.

I am deeply indebted to my astute faculty consultant, Dr. Lisa Hess, for her thoughtful consideration and analysis of the themes that I engaged and explored and for the insightful perspectives she provided to our cohort as a whole.

I am grateful for the time everyone spent helping to educate my context and for sharing their years of expertise in their various fields. I am further grateful for the wisdom imparted by my professional associates, Dr. Jacqueline Jones-Smith, Dr. Clarenda Phillips and Dr. Tamara Brown.

For the steadfast commitment shown to me at every turn throughout this project and for not only internalizing, but wholeheartedly investing in the vision through study, research, planning, giving of time, energy and resources week after week, I am forever indebted to my contextual associates, Ernest and Kim Blue, Helen Copeland, Gwen Jones, Janice McKethan and Ed and Clorie Tildon. I give thanks to the team members and volunteers who saw the value in the Harlem Renaissance Project and responded without hesitation to the call to help bridge the gap between the church and community in more ways that I can count, especially Brenda Pittman, Samontra Brightful, Nathaniel Holliday, Earl Ruff, Muriel Prioleau, Kathryn McCaskill, Cynthia Winkler, Letha Holliday, Paul Mills, Joyce Smith, Linda Baker, and the Union Memorial Mass Choir.

There are no words to adequately express my appreciation for my amazing church administrator, Brenda Brown, and support staff Paulette Early and Jewel Thompson. Every time they heard the words “doctoral project or dissertation” they responded, “Tell us what you need us to do.” It has been an honor and privilege to have worked with a support team who always had my back.

I extend a heartfelt thank you to my editor, Gwen Morgan, who seeks to ensure that my voice not only has clarity but doesn’t get lost in the grammatical and literary acrobatics I at times find difficult to navigate. Her support and willingness to help through the years have been an invaluable gift.

I also acknowledge the blessing I have in my brother-in-love, Michael White, Jr. and my father-figure friends, Kevin Hammack and Raymond Johnson who continue to move heaven and earth for me at a moment’s notice with no questions asked. I am eternally grateful for their commitment, patience and love.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my partner in life and ministry, my wife Sherron, who knew just what to say, when to say it and made sure that I had enough time, space and love to complete this task to the best of my ability. Her sacrifices and unwavering strength during my absences made the road that much easier to travel. This is another stone to add to the monument of our collective success

This project is dedicated to my kids, the Fantastic Four: Noah, Amari, Sincere and Riley, who cheered me on every step of the way, made sure that I was being “a good student” and always made my return from intensives a welcome home party for the record books. I pray that they see the completion of this project as an example of life's unlimited possibilities and that they will be inspired to reach beyond their grasp and far surpass my achievements!

This project is dedicated to my mother, Rosemary Jordan, the visionary who saw this as a reality long before I could even see it as a possibility. Her continued commitment to my education from the age of two all the way to now has been unparalleled and her desire to see the words “Reverend Doctor” in front of my name has helped me to keep pushing all the way to the finish line.

This project is also dedicated to my brother, Melvin Moore, who is my sounding board when life comes at me hard, always providing me with wise counsel and to my grandmother, Ethel Honemond, who I know prays for me even when I forget to pray for

myself. She has covered me in this and every other life endeavor with words of favor and success.

This project is dedicated to the people of Union Memorial United Methodist Church for allowing me to be their pastor. I am so thankful for the measure of patience, grace and understanding they have shown me as I continued on this doctoral road. They allowed me to observe, analyze and criticize in love so that we could grow into what God would have for us as a faith community ready to seek, serve and stand in solidarity with our neighbors.

This project is dedicated to the Ever Green Community for their willingness to let the new kid on the block invade their space and share his heartfelt desire for their collective well-being with little or no resistance.

This project is dedicated to every church seeking to be an agent of transformation in the life of the communities where they are located and in the lives of the people who dwell there and are willing to partner with them for revitalization beyond their wildest dreams.

ABBREVIATIONS

UMC	United Methodist Church
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We look at our reflection all of our lives. What we don't see is that the mirrors we use are distorted. Misperception starts with our self-reflection. We even, if not especially, see ourselves through a glass darkly. How could it be otherwise?

—Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor: Seeing Others Through the Eyes of Jesus*

INTRODUCTION

Seeing Many in Our Mirrors is a combination of introspective learning and intentional collaboration for the purposes of training, inspiring and bridging the gap that exists between the church and its surrounding community.

Based on my people-oriented nature and ability to find similarities between myself and individuals from all walks of life, I have been able to observe my ministry context and conclude that when there is a lack of knowledge that common ground exists between members of the church and community at-large, meaningful relationships don't develop that allow people to feel truly welcome and connected to one another. Over time, the congregation has embraced a practice of community that is more focused on the church as it presently exists and not as it could be. Consequently, those who are on the outside looking in have a hard time finding a place within the current culture and choose to not even attempt entry. By the same token, those who make it beyond the doors of the church struggle to find acceptance of what they have to offer based on a pre-existing structure that is adhered to by the congregation as a whole.

Over time the church has become more inwardly focused, with more time and attention given to pleasing the existing congregation than making adequate preparation for the congregation that has not fully come into being. This approach is taken with respect to a number of different areas such as worship and outreach, but most notably with respect to hospitality. These areas have become so sacred that any attempts to

infuse new life for the purposes of connecting with those whom the church does not already have an authentic relationship is resisted both consciously and sub-consciously.

The biblical, historical, theological and theoretical work which were completed on the front end of this project have helped to provide a lens for us to understand the necessity of such a work in the days and times in which we are living. There is presently such a large gap between what happens in our churches week after week and what is going on in the lives of the people who live around them. The inability of the church to be in regular, real, relationship with its neighbors questions the current relevancy of the church in light of what people are facing today. Ultimately, the question becomes, is there a continued need for the church if it is no longer living up to its original purpose upon which it was founded more than two thousand years ago?

In order to gain greater insight into my context and the surrounding community where it is situated, a number of individuals from each entity with diverse backgrounds from various walks of life were utilized in the completion of my project. Data that informed the direction of the project was collected through personal contact as well as social media. This method allowed for the collection of a broad range of answers to surveys administered and questions asked in casual as well as pointed conversation.

Beyond those who participated in the project by bringing the data to life through the sharing of experiences, a number of others undergirded and supported the implementation of this project. My contextual associates were primarily utilized in the dissemination of information around project events, collection and organization of data throughout the duration of the project as well as lending their own voices to help give authentic accounts as to how their congregations and communities shifted in their

dynamics along the way. My professional associates were utilized in lecture series to share expertise around the theoretical foundations that supported my project and in providing insight along the way that helped me to understand and better analyze data that was received. My peer associate was utilized as a knowledge resource around my context, its surrounding community and as a means for holding me accountable to timelines set and the intended outcome to be achieved.

While there were a great number of ideas that were tossed around and even scheduled to help shed light on the reason for disconnection amongst the church and community, factors beyond the control of the team and myself prohibited us from exploring these avenues in the limited time that was left. However, the continued work in the learning modules led us to believe that The Harlem Renaissance Project would be the best option to allow us to maximize the anticipated interaction between the church and community, while at the same time creating an atmosphere that would make data collection and analysis as simple as possible.

The first chapter deals with an overview of the life and times of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose work around the need for Beloved Community sets the tone for this project. This is coupled with my passion for peoples from all walks of life to see their oneness in one another against of the tension of my current ministry context and their struggle to engage in this practice consistently. The second chapter wrestles with two powerful biblical texts that deal with the disconnectedness of individuals from the church. The Old Testament text looks at Psalm 84 and the psalmist longing to be restored to right relationship with God as is played out through an inability to enter the temple. The New Testament text looks at John 4:4-42 and the woman at the well's

separation from community as a whole. The third chapter shifts the focus to look at how individuals have been displaced with regards to the church throughout history by addressing the practice of excommunication. The fourth chapter provides insight into the theological framework that has shaped me as a theologian as guided by Walter Rauschenbusch, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr., and helped give me a lens by which I can help address the evils of the world. The fifth chapter sheds light on the most recent work that has been done around preparing the church for relationship with the community and borrows methodologies from some of the leading practitioners of today such as Joseph W. Daniels, Rudy Rasmus, Bob Farr and others. The sixth and final chapter looks at the development and implementation of the Harlem Renaissance Project from beginning to end. It also includes recommendations for continued work by practitioners that are on the horizon looking to bridge the gap between church and community.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

As an advocate for the enhancement of life for all peoples and a believer in the collective struggle toward improvement of society, I have long viewed the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s championed vision of "Beloved Community" as reality that can be reached. While many might characterize King as an idealist who gave his life in pursuit of something the vast majority of people were not emotionally invested enough to support, the truth of the matter is that he was among the necessary forerunners who were broad enough in scope to address the numerous social issues of the day on the world stage. It is King and others like him, whose work during the Civil Rights era afforded people not just in America, but also around the globe an opportunity to look at how they approach basic human decency in light of an individual's sacred worth. Thus, what took place in the 1960's not only laid the groundwork for dealing with injustices imposed due to the color of someone's skin, but also opened the door to begin having conversations about economic inequalities across a vast spectrum, gender biases in the workplace, educational inadequacies between neighborhoods, sexual orientation disparities in arenas where preference is known and so much more.

The aforementioned issues and so many more continue to be played out in 21st century society particularly in urban centers across the United States of America. As a United Methodist pastor presently serving in Baltimore, Maryland, preparing to begin my

next journey leading an inner city church, I see a great opportunity for faith communities to regain relevancy that has been lost amongst the pomp and circumstance of the last fifty years.

It is time for churches to go back to answering their initial call to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Following the assassination of Dr. King, many major cities were burned and went up in flames as an outcry of frustration around the ongoing suffering endured within the black community. The racial bigotry that still was the order of the day in spite of government intervention through the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and the Voting Rights of 1965 still resulted in a lack of access to the American dream by people of color.

The church, which had been the center of life for African-American as a means of coping and wading through the waters of injustice began to be perceived insufficient, and members of the community took matters into their own hands. Unfortunately, more harm than good has been done as communities have not recovered from the riots of the 1960s. The destruction has resulted in vacant buildings, which have been a breeding ground for illegal activity, with a high focus on drug trafficking and usage. This has limited business investments in areas, thus resulting in high rates of unemployment and a growing number of individuals on public assistance straining the economy and a large number of others finding solace in alcohol or crime to make a way, however ill-gotten for families. The more unflattering the circumstances in the community, the greater the impact on the home life, which often time spills over for youth in the school system and the ability to be successful. Consequently, the educational opportunities are not as plentiful and when young people are either not challenged or given opportunities to excel.

They are more susceptible to become a distraction to others in the environment. This ultimately causes poor performance, high dropout rates and thus reinforces an already deeply troubled system.

I have always been drawn to the power that exudes during worship when people get in the presence of God. It is my belief that God meets people in worship and this is where a special exchange takes places between those who have come broken before the only one who can make them whole. It does my heart glad to see that people who come in one way have the opportunity to be transformed through being part of the fellowship of believers, singing the songs of Zion, praying the prayers of the righteous, searching the Holy Scriptures, sharing in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and hearing the proclamation of the preached Word of God. Each of these actions are means of grace by which those deemed by self or society to be the least, last and lost encounter God to discover new realities for their lives.

The ministry context I am serving is Union Memorial United Methodist Church, a congregation that is part of the Baltimore Metropolitan District in the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church. Union Memorial is a historic church in the city of Baltimore, Maryland with a 125 plus year legacy of being a powerful, spiritual presence in the community particularly for people of color looking to express their appreciation to God for faithfully taking them beyond the labors, dreams, and achievements of their ancestors.

Steeped in tradition, this faith community has played a pivotal role in providing a Wesleyan presence in the community at-large particularly following a period of gentrification in the early 1900's. Historically speaking, individuals who had achieved

certain levels of prominence in society, in particularly black society, were the primary people packing the pews on Sunday morning. This was a church filled with politicians, doctors, lawyers, educators and those who had advanced to a place of economic self-sufficiency. Strong pastoral leadership championed those who saw it as vital to give one's time, resources and connections to the ministry of the church. As a result, the church flourished for decades. Yet, as individuals moved out of the neighborhood due to upward mobility and the demographics of the neighborhood around the church changed, a somewhat insular model to doing ministry amongst congregations began to work against the church and its ties to the community.

Consequently, an aging congregation and an aloof community has widened the gap, leaving a great opportunity for bridging to take place between those who call Union Memorial home exclusively on Sunday mornings and those who call the neighborhood on its perimeter home 24/7. Yet, there are signs of hope that all is not lost. The seasoned saints are committed to seeing the church live beyond their years. The young adults recognize the cries from the community as needs critical to their immediate welfare and the greater world spectrum. There is enough physical space to create room for common ground to establish a beloved community and renaissance of the church for future generations.

At the present date, Union Memorial is still a well-respected congregation in the city of Baltimore from the perspective of United Methodists and others alike. It is a congregation full of tradition, and in some respects, looking to reclaim the prominence it had in earlier years. I believe that this is definitely possible considering its location in Baltimore City, the commitment of the existing congregation to its success, and my

desire as the incoming pastor to take the congregation to the next level. Yet, there are several factors that must be taken into consideration over the course of the next year.

First and foremost, Union Memorial is a large building that isn't being used to its fullest potential. In order for this to occur, there are significant repairs that need to take place to not only address structural concerns, but also modernize the interior so as not to fall victim to the stereotype many cathedral style edifices face: old looking building, older people, not much going on of interest to younger generations. The Board of Trustees is currently leading what is to be a five-year building program to address the maintenance needs across the board. This project will not only bring the building up to code, but up to date so that rooms that have primarily been serving as storage space can begin to house people for a wide-variety of programs that will address needs of the current congregation and the one that will evolve over the next 125 years of Union Memorial's ministry.

With respect to the programming, it will be essential for the congregation to begin the process of reconnecting with the community at large and gaining a clear understanding of the day-to-day as well as long-range needs of the residents. Through this process of relationship building, the church can understand the role it must place in making disciples for work in and with this community, with the understanding that it will take more than the doors just being open on Sunday mornings. Following a period of information gathering, it will be necessary to assess what resources already exist within the church and then build upon this by forging partnerships with local governmental and non-governmental organizations and businesses. These alliances can aid in our attempts to improve the overall quality of life for residents who will then develop a vested interest

in the church's success. Finally, it is our prayer that our neighbors will become congregants and assure the success continues.

At the present time the challenge remains getting connected. As the congregation continues to age, the challenge in part will be to welcome not only new faces but those of a younger demographic who can learn and glean from the older generations and still help to keep the church relevant for generations to come. This may mean doing things differently from how they have been done before. We may not be able to be as heavily steeped in tradition as we have always been, but instead allow room for the contemporary to find a seat at the table for a blending of ideas that will reach people across the spectrum. The music ministry of the church is strong and will definitely be a means by which people are able to do this. Music is the universal language and it allows people who would ordinarily be in different places to come together and find common ground. It is my hope that this will be a way for us to reach people and help set the atmosphere, not only for the preached Word to empower their lives, but inspire them to make a difference in the world beyond Union Memorial. I believe the potential is great, and if the people are willing, not even the sky can be the limit to what Union Memorial UMC can do in this the next best season of her ministry to the masses.

My formal education began at St. Francis Xavier Catholic School. My mother was looking for a strong day care program and the neighborhood Catholic Church offered one that came highly recommended. Little did I know that our time in the weekly mass would spark my interest in wanting to know more about church. After all, I went to church every Sunday with my family, but I was extremely curious back then as to why only certain people got to eat the bread and drink from the cup during worship at school.

My time in Catholic School reinforced what I was getting in Sunday School and at home, building a strong understanding of the biblical text even as a child.

As a predominantly single parent, my mother thought it more advantageous to begin putting away for college instead of putting out so much money on primary education when the public school system had an equally as challenging curriculum as the parochial school. At age eight, I entered Randle Highlands Elementary and this is where I began to flourish. With numerous extracurricular activities being offered, I had the chance to become a better-rounded student. It was during this time frame that I became involved in the music program and joined the choir and marching band. My love for music deeply grew, having sung my first solo at the age of five for my aunt's retirement. This is just what I needed to come into my own as a young minister in song.

Following a strong primary and secondary educational foundation, I began my undergraduate studies as a student at Boston University in the College of General Studies until I had the chance to decide on my major. Numerous thoughts roamed in my head about how I might best utilize my talents and abilities parlaying them into a career. My earliest thoughts were that I would become a lawyer, specifically in the area of entertainment and contract negotiations. My passion for music and the arts combined with a natural proclivity to be a conversationalist would probably prove me to be a formidable legal mind. Upon learning that Boston University didn't have a pre-law major I was advised by my advisor to consider some other options that would help to undergird me in my academic and professional pursuits.

I chose to spend my last two years of undergrad as a Communication major, with a concentration in Advertising. This was undoubtedly one of the best decisions I ever

made, as I can honestly say I learned so much from the courses that have benefited my raw talent as a graphic designer. My oral and written communication skills were also strengthened during this time frame. These two years gave me a great deal of insight into the business as well as the creative side of advertising. I had developed a pretty extensive portfolio and felt ready to showcase my work before some of the country's top advertising ad agencies and multi-media firms. But, there was something else calling out to me.

As I walked down Commonwealth Avenue back in March 2006 with my portfolio in hand something came over me. I began to think about the competition that I was about to experience not only amongst my peers, but the on-going competitiveness that came with the industry. (rephrased) I then began to think about how I would fare financially if I couldn't impress clients; after all, I had never been good at selling anything, not even the candy bars for elementary school fundraisers. Then suddenly, I heard the voice of God speak to me. God said loud and clear, "Sell me. I'm the easiest sale. I sell myself." I made a u-turn never stepping foot in the school with my work to display. Instead, I went back to my dorm room where I could think. My thinking turned into praying and then some more thinking.

Up to this point, my faith had really been strengthened as I had been used to share how God had been working in my life with my friends in the Boston University Inner Strength Gospel Choir. I had served this organization on my school's campus as Tour Coordinator, taking the choir on their first international tour to Canada as well as to Detroit . I later became choir president and helped lead the continued growth and development of those who were looking for a place to come at the end of one week and

the beginning of another and experience the Spirit of God moving amongst the people. This activity became more of a ministry to me; one which I took very seriously and actively recruited other young people of various racial, faith and socio-economic backgrounds.

By week's end I was on the phone with my pastor and father in the ministry asking for his advice. Following our conversation, it was clear that I was finally at a place where I was ready to respond to the call God had placed on my life of bringing God's people together to experience an awareness of the power of God working in them for the transformation of the world. The only question was, "Where would I pursue my theological education?" My pastor suggested that while home on spring break, that he take me to his alma mater, Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. After surveying the campus, sitting in on a number of classes and meeting the faculty, I had an opportunity for some one-on-one time with Dr. William B. McClain, Wesley's then premier preaching professor. Perceiving the preached word as one of the foremost vehicles for presenting the Gospel of Christ to the world, my time with this great orator and theological mind helped to embolden me to the notion that studying under this man would help to take me to higher heights and deeper depths in the word. There was then no further doubt in my mind where I wanted to attend school. I was coming home to DC and beginning my journey to solidifying who I would be as a spiritual leader not only in my church, but also beyond as my aspirations toward pastoral ministry began to grow.

As a life-long Methodist, who has sampled a little doctrine from other Christian denominations, I have been referred to as a "Baptomethocostal", but I have prayerfully held on to my Methodist roots and how they have shaped my understanding of who God

is and who we are being called to be as God's children. I rely heavily on the Wesleyan understanding of grace as the definitive factor of our existence. We have been kept by grace, saved by grace and are being transformed by grace. Our heritage as a denomination was key in my decision to seek ordination as an elder in the church. The process for me had somewhat of a smooth start, but as with everything else in life, sooner or later you will experience a little rain and possibly even a storm.

The peaceful reassuring part of my embarking upon this journey in ministry was that returning home, I had a place to lay my head at my mother's house and I found myself gainfully employed. At the beginning of my sophomore year of high school, I started working for the United States Department of the Treasury at Financial Management Service in the Check Claims Branch. As I reflect upon my time of government service, from winter and spring breaks to a permanent full time position after graduation, I can truly say the interpersonal skills I gained on this job have proven to be extremely invaluable to me. Working with federal and state agencies, but moreover working with payees who had been swindled by persons who thought it better to rip them off than going out and making their own way in the world was really rewarding work. This was especially the case after a long investigation process would finally yield restoration and wholeness to individuals who were on disability, retired, or the children of folks who were unable to care for themselves.

I have faithfully served three churches since my ministry journey officially began in 2006. Upon my return home, I began serving as Director of Worship and Arts at my home church, Mt. Zion-Warren UMC in Dickerson, MD. As a family church in a rural community, the congregation has long grown accustomed to utilizing the prescribing order

of worship as found in the United Methodist Hymnal. Steeped in tradition, the worship experience, while it did have occasional deeply moving moments, was for the most part rigid and lacking in opportunity for the Holy Spirit to be as free flowing as one might expect. However, a newly assigned pastor open to connecting the dots between the biblical and the practical, led the charge in making worship more participatory and less of a spectator sport. Seeing that I had gifts in the areas of music and drama, I was green lighted to design worship experiences that incorporated a variety of different art forms. I called upon people who had long been comfortable in the pews to participate in the communication of the gospel through spoken word, liturgical dance, mime, poetry, dramatic presentations and so much more. My original productions were the featured worship experiences during the high liturgical times of the church such as Christmas and Easter. They were also featured during major church milestones, such as the annual Homecoming and Church Anniversary. The establishment of a praise and worship team under my leadership also aided in the transition from an aging and ailing Sanctuary Choir to a multi-generational group of worshippers who were also diverse in how they ushered people into the presence of God.

As a student at Wesley Theological Seminary, I was required to participate in the Practice of Ministry and Mission Program. In the fall of 2008, I bade my home congregation farewell and began serving as the ministerial intern at Good Hope Union UMC in Silver Spring, MD. A larger congregation than my home church afforded me the opportunity to serve in a variety of areas, expand my knowledge base, and prepare me for the next level of ministry. It was during this period that I began exploring the use of multi-media in worship. I used video clips from television and movies to illustrate points

of my sermons. I saw the importance first hand of visually communicating concepts that the congregation needed to absorb as being just as critical as information that is shared verbally.

Upon my graduation from seminary, following two years as an intern, I was eligible for a full-time appointment as a senior pastor. The bishop appointed me to serve at St. John UMC in Pumphrey, MD. I can truly say that each of my ministry experiences have shaped and formed me into the pastor I am today, but none more so than The St. John Experience as it has affectionately come to be known. I had been afforded the opportunity to lead this congregation into uncharted territory on many levels but especially with respect to worship. During the six years of my tenure as pastor of St. John, we literally “Packed the House” Sunday after Sunday with record numbers in worship due to our ability to offer traditional and contemporary forms of worship that met people where they were and transported them to the places where God was calling them to be. The worship experience tapped into the everyday lives of people experiencing liturgy to which they could relate --whether based on a popular TV show of the 1970s that focused on African Americans with economic struggles such as “Good Times” or hooks to songs of the 1990’s like “Real Love” by Mary J. Blige to illustrate the yearning of the younger generations to find a love on which they could depend

My faith in God has kept me rooted and grounded throughout all of life’s many ups and downs. I have been blessed to live out that faith as a pastor. I never knew how much joy and satisfaction I could find in the privilege of being present for some of the most precious and painful moments of people’s lives. It is a humbling experience to have people who for all intents and purposes are perfect strangers, invite you into their homes,

their hearts and their lives to share with them along the journey. I know that this is what I have truly been called to do and wouldn't want to do anything else.

I know that God has blessed me with the unique ability to be present with people when they need it the most. I know that I know how to listen and speak to the best parts of people until they see it for themselves as a reality. I know God has given me the ability to see beyond standards and norms to embrace innovative concepts that have the capacity to engage people in ministry that probably would never have connected before. I know that God has blessed me with a high tolerance for all things people related, with the understanding that we all come to the table with a wealth of issues that may cause us to act uncharacteristically of who God has called us to be. I know God has helped me to plan ahead for the church of tomorrow while at the same time honor the church of yesteryear while respectfully and responsibly navigating the ever-present tension.

While I acknowledge that God has gifted me in a number of areas, I know that there are still a number of growing edges that I will need to further develop. I have always had difficulty saying "no". I acknowledge that time management has never been one of my strong suits primarily because of the aforementioned reason. I know that while I have a high tolerance for things, I don't have very much patience in seeing things come to pass although this is an area that has seen drastic improvement overall.

My life hasn't been perfect, but it has been purposeful in its entirety. I can truly say I wouldn't take anything for my journey thus far. God has been between each line of pain and glory. I look forward to seeing what God has for me next, but I stay in a state of continued belief that my next season will still be my best one yet.

Through my Doctor of Ministry work, I explored how an individual's life stories have unacknowledged similarities that need to intersect for the purpose of cultivating a welcoming environment which allows people to find common ground and feel comfortable enough to confront challenges in the changing of inner city realities. The life of every individual is compounded in some way shape or form by issues that they would rather do without. These issues manifest themselves in a number of different ways that may further obstruct the individual from realizing their fullest potential. As someone who has a great deal of experience with working with people from all walks of life, I feel that I will be well suited to facilitate a project of this magnitude.

It will take my ability to be in conversation with people from every walk of life; hearing their story and discerning what is at the core driving their destruction, supporting their stagnation or slowing down their success. It will also take my love for artistic expression as it is played out through music, dance, poetry, painting and so many other mediums that convey the sentiments of people's souls. I believe that my charismatic leadership style is what will be needed to bring people alongside me in the life of the church to help them clearly see the impact that this project will have not only on lives beyond the four walls of the church, but additionally the renewed sense of call for those in the congregation. It is my belief that this project will enable my ministry context to be more than a "Sunday morning church" but instead a critical piece to the puzzle of ensuring a revitalized community and ultimately a better Baltimore.

The project will include an opportunity for the congregation to re-open its doors to the community. Once inside, the congregation and community will be given an opportunity to get to know each other. Through government agency and non-profit

program support, the day-to-day needs of community persons will begin to be met. After meaningful relationships are established through mutual trusts, individuals will then share their stories of how they got to where they presently are and afforded an opportunity to work with an artistic professional for the purpose of conveying their journey in a deeply moving way. Individuals will then work with a worship team to design a worship service tailored around their life. Others with similar stories will be targeted via word of mouth and other more sophisticated forms of promotion to attend the worship experience to hear how God has been active and at work in the life of the individual. Conversation will then occur with the participant and attendees to determine the next steps for continued success.

It is my hope that at the end of this project I will learn more about the issues in the lives of those whom I am called to serve. This knowledge will help me to live out my call more effectively as I inspire the congregation to step up to serve in ways that will give their existence new meaning and help participants develop a greater sense of self worth. Ultimately, the community will become a reflection of the vessels who were once lost but have now found themselves by God's grace.

As I look toward to the next five to ten years and beyond of Union Memorial's ministry, I am convinced that the congregation's best days are ahead of them if they establish a vital partnership with the community for mutual growth and development. This partnership will create a plan for the sustainability of the congregation beyond its present life expectancy as well as shifting the current direction of the community to be more hope-filled. Based on my beliefs that past problems are not destiny disqualifiers, the church should be a place of spiritual, mental and social growth. Investment in our communities produces self-worth and pride, and worship has the power to take people

from where they are to where God is calling them to be. Therefore, the theme of my Doctor of Ministry project will be “Seeing Many In Our Mirrors: A Model for Transforming High-Steeple Churches to Community Revitalization Centers”. With the life work of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King undergirding this journey, I am aware that it will be full of unknowns along the way, but I will embrace them for the ultimate purpose of making a difference in lives and changing the entire landscape of communities and the world.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The Bible is the living Word of God. It is the timeless account of how people have experienced God down through the ages and points to the many we are continuing to do so today. In the Bible, we find evidence of human beings encountering the issues of everyday life. We are given an opportunity to bear witness to their responses to these issues based on their relationship with a God who is active in their lives and in that of the world around them.

As individuals continue to look for hope in the midst of the pain they may be experiencing from problems and predicaments of their existence, the biblical narrative gives insight into God's faithfulness even when we as God's people are not faithful. There are numerous illustrations throughout the biblical text where God's people stray from God and yet, God never ceases to protect or bless them. As one comes to understand the basic pattern of the Holy Scripture, it is clear that people constantly stand in need of God's grace and mercy amidst decisions that leave them in peculiar places more times than not.

The biblical text masterfully acknowledges the sinful nature of humanity and the numerous opportunities God provides to human beings for recognition, repentance, redemption and restoration. This four-fold process is one that allows individuals to be

brought back into right relationship with God and experience the new possibilities for their lives thereafter. There is no more powerful way to realize this than through worship. Worship is the act we as God's people do to acknowledge and express our gratitude for all God has done in our lives. In our contemporary understanding, it is how people have experience God in their lives from one Sunday to the next. Thus, anything that hinders an individual from regular participation in worship essentially is prohibiting the flow of divine revelation to people that God did something for them they could not do for themselves and consequently they are no longer the same. Thus, not only is there a need for regular access to worship; it must be worship that connects with people, meeting them where they are in life and transporting them to where God has destined for them to be.

There are two scriptural passages that will support my work and serve as evidence for the need to eradicate barriers in the life of the Church that stop individuals from seeing their day-to-day experiences as having commonality with respect to others. The Old Testament passage guiding and supporting my work is the 84th Psalm, in which the psalmist has a longing to return to God's presence, specifically as is realized in the temple courts.

The biblical account of the 84th Psalm is one of the most beautiful psalms ever written in its clear articulation of the beauty of God's dwelling place, the Temple and the heartfelt longing to return to this place by the psalmist. In the psalmist's impassionedly expressed sentiments, it becomes clear that there is no place in all the world that can compare to the Temple or what one gains from being present there. It is simultaneously an acknowledgement of what it feels like not to be present in the Temple or with God.

While the beauty of this place known as the Temple is definitely at the forefront of this passage, surrounding it is the understanding of the lengths that one is willing to go to in order to be there and the comparison of experiences for those who have arrived and those who for whatever reason are being kept at bay.

Psalm 84 consists of two halves. The first half focuses on the aspect of pilgrimage to the House of God. The second half focuses on how much better it is to dwell with God than dwell apart from Him.¹

The 84th Psalm addresses issues that go right to the heart of the human condition. Its verse allows us to deal with the issues of loneliness, self-worth, a sense of belonging and ultimately finding our way back to God.

The New Testament passage guiding and supporting my work is the 4th chapter of The Gospel of John, verses 1-12, in which Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman who is separated from the community due to life choices, but is more at odds with her separations from God. The biblical account of The Samaritan Woman or The Woman at the Well as it is often referred to is one of the most well known stories in all of scripture. It allows readers to observe an honest interface between the Savior of the World and one whom He was sent to save. It is without a shadow of a doubt one of the most honest, real and raw conversations that the biblical narrative has to offer. This no-holds barred exchange between Jesus and this nameless woman allows readers, if careful and willing, to address issues which are a thousand year's later still dominant and unresolved. This encounter tackles the issues of race, gender and religion. While this is by no means an exhaustive list of the issues that are raised by the biblical text, it does however begin to

¹ Nathan Albright. Edge Induced Cohesion Blog. Psalm 84: How Lovely Is Your Tabernacle/Better Is One Day, accessed September 29, 2016, <https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2011/05/04/psalm-84-how-lovely-is-your-tabernacle-better-is-one-day/>

shed light on the underlying problems that cause barriers and blockades to believers and non-believers alike. It seeks to explore what a really meaningful relationship with God looks like on the surface as well as at its core.

There is no way anyone can read the accounts laid out in the Gospels and certainly ones like that of “The Samaritan Woman” captured in John and not take an introspective look at themselves. The Gospel of John in particular is a breeding ground for thoughtful, critical reflection on how a relationship with one who was willing to give up his life that we might have life more abundantly ought to compel us to change the way we live altogether.

Old Testament: Psalm 84

Exegeses

There is unquestionably a deep admiration by the psalmist of God’s temple and the feelings that this sacred space holds for the psalmist as conveyed throughout the text. The psalmist recognizes an unparalleled beauty that exists at the Temple, but this is not a beauty that is connected to aesthetics of the building. It is one that allows the psalmist to find an overall sense of serenity, security and satisfaction because of the strong presence of God’s Spirit while at the Temple.

As you travel through the verses of this passage, it is clear that something has occurred in the life of the psalmist or that of his community that has caused him to be disconnected from the dwelling place of God or perhaps even banished. Consequently, the psalmist appears to be experiencing spiritual exile from God and is at the point of

desperation trying to work his way back to God. While on the surface it appears to be about regaining access to the place where God's Spirit dwells because of the strength that the psalmist was used to gaining from this environment, there exists a deeper longing by the psalmist to be reconnected with the Spirit.

The psalmist is at a place where if he doesn't get back to the presence of God, life for him, which is clearly already bad, is about to take a turn for the worst, from which the psalmist believes there will be no coming back.

The psalmist appears to have had an experience, which has reminded him of how wonderful it used to be or could be in the dwelling place and is looking to make this a reality again. There are thoughts that come across as envious but then shift to that of an epiphany when the psalmist realizes that "if sparrows have nests and swallows have a place in the temple", then certainly, he as a human being created, shaped and molded in the image of God should be welcomed in as well. The psalmist utilizes language such as home, which reemphasizes that he is displaced or presently without shelter, and or protection. The psalmist's desperation is more clearly related to the atmospheric conditions of everyday life, which could be an exhaustive list of things that the psalmist has endured since last time they were in the presence of God's spirit. It is almost as if the psalmist is building a case that results in saying everyone and everything is fine, but asks the powerful questions, "What about me? Everyone else appears to be fine. Everyone else appears to be all right, but what about me? Is there any chance I'm going to be able to get reconnected with the God of my salvation?"

There is a stating of the facts about what others have found and there is the asking of the rhetorical question, "If they can get what they need, then why can't I?" There is a

desire to get closer to God. It is as if to say, “Being in your dwelling place is great, but being at your feet is so much better.” The psalmist makes the observation that those who find their way into God’s presence are always praising God. The psalmist, who appears to know something about being in God’s presence appears to go as far with an assertion that one who has experienced how good it feels being in God’s presence, but also the clear benefits and perks can’t help but praise God. Being on the receiving end of God’s goodness and mercy makes it pretty impossible not to give God the praise. It is an unavoidable consequence of one who has come into contact with the living God. Your life is never ever the same again.

The psalmist acknowledges the benefits of being in God’s presence and connected to God in such a way that you have something you wouldn’t automatically have without the connection. God is a God of resources for those who have come into a relationship with God. When an individual realizes their strength, skills, talents and abilities are tied directly to that of God, they are blessed. It is an acknowledgment of the fact that even when we in our humanness can’t, it’s ok because God in God’s divinity can and will.

The psalmist talks about a happiness that exists amongst those who have found their way into God’s presence, so much so that no matter where life takes them, they are well because God is with them. There is talk about going through a valley, which is normally a low and dark place, however in the psalmist’s observation, even if there are the atmospheric conditions for those who are with God, their countenance, affect or demeanor remains positive. The psalmist’s analysis is that they don’t experience weakness and even if they do, it is not apparent to them or those who observe and encounter them. As modern day assessments would conclude, “They don’t look like

what they've been through." God will not allow God's people to appear anything less than blessed, because God understands that this would be a negative reflection upon God in the world.

The psalmist makes a direct request to God to hear his prayer. He makes a special request for God to not just hear it, but to listen intentionally to the prayer for the purpose of providing an appropriate response. He directs God's attention to the fact that a shield is being held up, which is a sign of protecting oneself. The psalmist utilizes this imagery to convey that he has been under some type of attack, which requires a force more powerful than himself.

While the psalmist makes clear that it is his desire to reside with God continuously, he concedes that he would rather settle for one day in the courts of God than none at all because the courts of God provide a sense of serenity, security and satisfaction that aren't available anywhere else. The psalmist acknowledges a willingness to be a doorkeeper in God's house rather than to take up permanent residence in the tent of the wicked.

The psalmist takes time to justify his reasoning by highlighting the attributes of God, characterizing God as sun and shield, one who provides light as an alternative to darkness and one who provides protection as an alternative to vulnerability. The psalmist identifies God as a giver of privileges that aren't always earned and certainly undeserved. There is a revelation that God doesn't hold anything back from those who walk in a way that is pleasing to God. These persons are without lack and live in perpetual abundance. Whatever they need, not only is God aware of it, but also is able and willing to supply it.

The psalmist acknowledges an overall happiness that exists for those that have learned how to put their trust and ultimately their lives in the hands of God.

The psalmist expresses several different emotions that are evident in the urgency by which he or she is communicating. There is an excitement and admiration around being present with God at the place where God's spirit dwells. Yet, there is also sadness or disappointment that the psalmist is not there and apparently is having difficulty returning. Much of the dialogue from the psalmist is nostalgic and reminiscent of times well spent by the psalmist or those whom the psalmist knows. It is clear from the psalmist's speech that he has come to be well acquainted with what it means to not only be in the presence of God, but moreover to be in relationship with God.

The major character of this biblical text is the psalmist who is the speaker. However, he is directing his address of concern and feelings of longing to God. Thus, God is the target audience for all that the psalmist is lamenting about in the text. The psalmist makes reference to birds, in particular a sparrow and a swallow by comparing their apparent success to having serenity, security and satisfaction in life to his current inability to do the same. The psalmist points out that God has a relationship with these creatures and in turn questions his or her relationship with God as another one of God's creations. While much of the conversation is about God and is directed toward God, another important player in the text are those who were in right relationship or good standing with God, to the extent that they are regularly in the Temple or in God's presence.

Happiness is the major theme that is repeated numerous times throughout the text by the psalmist. He is clearly looking for it, craving it, yearning for it and is aware that

the only way it will be achieved is through being with God. The psalmist has taken particular interest in those who have found happiness and is clear that it is directly tied to their relationship with God.

Loneliness

As the psalmist engages in this discourse, one thing is certain; he definitely feels alone. Loneliness is a sentiment that is just short of long lasting isolation from others. The depth of the psalmist's plea causes one to see that this is not a recent isolation, but one that has been in effect for quite some time. For many believers loneliness is an ongoing struggle. Whether it is because of the loss of a family member or the lack of a support system altogether, loneliness is something that is all too real for people in today's society. Our basic human inclination is to want to be in the company of others, even if only for a small period of time. Prolonged absence from the presence of others can lead to feelings of depression and lack of self-worth.

Self-Worth

Our opinion of ourselves in relationship to the rest of the world is something of high importance to us as human beings. Whether we want to admit it or not, how others feel about us, relate to us or choose not to relate to us has a serious impact on who we are and what we think about ourselves.

Although, self-worth is often used as a synonym for "self-esteem," Dr. Lisa Firestone believes that self-worth should be less about measuring yourself based on external actions and more about valuing your inherent worth as a person. In other words, self-worth is about who you are, not about what you do. Dr. Kristin Neff argues that there is a problem with society's focus on high self-esteem. The problem is that this focus involves measuring oneself against others, rather than

paying attention to one's intrinsic value. "Our competitive culture tells us we need to be special and above average to feel good about ourselves, but we can't all be above average at the same time," says Dr. Neff. In this sense, searching for self-worth by constantly comparing ourselves to others means always fighting a losing battle.²

The psalmist spends a great deal of time looking at his own life with respect to other human beings and even birds, which appear to have found happiness. The difficulty in approaching life this way is that we do not know the internal or external struggles that others have had to go through in order to achieve their perceived happiness. We make assumptions and unrealistic expectations of ourselves based on who others are and not who God has created us to be.

Sense of Belonging

For many people, there is nothing worse than being on the outside and looking in. This is clearly where the psalmist feels that he is in relationship to everyone else in the text. His observations of others expresses an arrival at a place of success and contentment that he yearns to be a part of, but does not necessary know how to go about getting there. No one wants to feel like they are left out or being excluded. When you are looked over or not given the attention you have come to understand your humanity entitles you to, it leads to feelings of confusion and uncertainty regarding your place in a particular group, but also with respect to the rest of the world. From the time that we are children we look to belong to our circle of friends, picked for team sports, asked to be a partner on a group project and so many other instances. We carry this into our adult life

²PsychAlive. The Importance of Self-Worth, accessed September 30, 2016, <https://www.psychalive.org/self-worth/>

and when we experience rejection, it causes us to either rebel or retreat within looking for answers that may not be so readily available.

Finding Our Way Back to God

The Word of God reminds us that we were shaped, molded and created in the very image of God. We have always been the apple of God's eye. Yet, the original sin of our ancestor Adam established our fallen nature, but did not cement it for the rest of eternity. God's desire to be reunited with us as God's children and re-establish right standing in God's sight is at the forefront of every exchange we have with God. As we continue into a greater awareness of who God is and what God has done on our behalf that we might have life and have it more abundantly, the believer cannot help but to allow their own personal desires to decrease and allow the will of God to increase taking priority in their lives. This is a life-long journey for every living, breathing person that we must all take in order to experience true wholeness and ultimate fulfillment. As we go throughout this life, we will find that our lives absent from God are always lacking something. However, with God and God alone, we see that everything else is an added bonus.

New Testament: John 4:4-42

Exegeses

The narrator of the passage of scripture communicates that Jesus had to go through Samaria. It is unclear from the outset if these travel plans were necessitated by travel restrictions which did not allow him to take another route or if this was Jesus's

personal desire to stop in this vicinity because of something this region had that Jesus could find no where else. “The geographical necessity of the trip is supported by Josephus who notes that the most expedient route from Judea to Galilee during the first century was through Samaria.”³

It is interesting to note that Sychar, the city in which Jesus stopped, was close in proximity to the city Jacob had given to his son, Joseph. This is where Jacob’s well was located. Samaria was where Gentiles resided and in particular Gentiles who did not have a good history with the Jews. By tradition, Jews did not associate with Samaritans. So it begs the questions: How did Jacob’s well get built on Samaritan land or how did these Samaritans come to possess the land that the Jews once had? While traditionally there wasn’t a great deal of intermingling between Jews and Samaritans, it is important to note that Joseph had received the land from his father. Joseph was a Jew who had a great deal of expertise with being in relationships with non-Jewish groups, (i.e. His oversight responsibilities in Egypt). Perhaps Joseph’s relationship with Egypt was a precursor to Jesus’ relationship with Samaria.

The text indicates that Jesus, having been tired from His journey thus far, sits down by the well at around noon. We don’t know how long Jesus had been traveling, but his fatigue communicates that it has probably been for a considerable amount of time. Moreover, the narrator’s mention of the time lets us know that Jesus has been traveling close to the time period when the sun is at its hottest, regardless of what season it is, but especially if this travel is occurring during the summer months. It is noticeable that Jesus is alone at this point, with the twelve having already been sent ahead to get food. Here

³ George Corrigan. Friarmusings. At the well: some background, accessed September 30, 2016, <https://friarmusings.wordpress.com/2017/03/14/at-the-well-some-background>

Jesus does not have to be in conversation with anyone. His companions are tending to other business, which frees Jesus to do something He rarely does which is rest. The opportunity presents itself for Jesus to practice real self-care and realign himself with the Father in heaven.

The narrator makes mention of a Samaritan woman who arrives on the scene to draw water from the well. We do not know the length of time that passed from Jesus' arrival at the well to the time the woman arrives. However, considering the time of day, it begs the question, of what circumstances brought her to the well when the sun was at its hottest. Women normally begin early in the morning in their travel because of the distance to get to the well and draw water. They do so to ensure that they will not have to carry so much water in the heat of the day. Thus, one must wonder what happened on this particular day that would have caused her to come so late to draw water from the well or is this her regular time for coming to the well and if so, why?

Immediately upon her arrival at the well, Jesus tells the woman, "Give me a drink." It appears to be less of a request and more of a demand. This may be attributed to the level of thirst that Jesus was experiencing as he sat there in the heat, waiting for someone who had the proper equipment to come and draw water from the well. It is clear that Jesus is without a bucket, rope or ladle that would be necessary to bring water up. We also discover as an aside from the narrator that the disciples had gone to get food. It becomes clearer that Jesus was extremely depleted of all manner of nourishment from his most recent journey. While Jesus may not have been at the point of starvation, he certainly could have been close to dehydration.

A human can go for more than three weeks without food (Mahatma Gandhi survived 21 days of complete starvation), but water is a different story. At least

60% of the adult body is made of it and every living cell in the body needs it to keep functioning. Water acts as a lubricant for our joints, regulates our body temperature through sweating and respiration, and helps to flush waste. The maximum time an individual can go without water seems to be a week — an estimate that would certainly be shorter in difficult conditions, like broiling heat.⁴

With this in mind, the urgency upon which Jesus is demanding water makes sense. His could have been going through a number of changes considering the long period of exposure to the heat and the amount of water that he had already lost through perspiration. Thus, getting water was critical to his immediate ability to continue to function and ultimately His survival. Thus, it is clear as to why Jesus would throw all societal protocol out the window and tend to his basic human needs first. Ultimately, this sets the stage for His interaction with this woman as it normally does for His interaction with most people society would not deem as worthy of Jesus' time or attention. Jesus generally throws societal protocol out the window in order to address people's basic human needs first.

The woman, on the other hand, was clearly aware that Jesus had broken societal protocol by speaking to her and asks the question of “How can he do this?” Yet the more burning question, that is on the inside of this woman is, “Why would he do this?” Why would He risk the embarrassment or ridicule of others to engage in conversation and even more poignantly making a request of this woman?

First a Jewish man did not initiate conversation with an unknown woman. Moreover, a Jewish teacher did not engage in public conversation with a woman. Second, Jews did not invite contact with Samaritans. The Fourth Evangelist's aside in v. 9 underscores the seriousness of the breach between Jews and

⁴ Dina Spector. Business Insider. Here's How Many Days a Person Can Survive Without Water, accessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-many-days-can-you-survive-without-water-2014-5>

Samaritans. A fear of ritual contamination developed into a prohibition of all social intercourse.⁵

We have already seen that Jesus was at a desperate place, where he needed to be replenished. Other Jews would have probably suffered even until death to avoid being in contact with this Samaritan woman. However we know that Jesus is no ordinary Jew. The irony that exists here is that Jesus had already committed to suffering until the point of death just to be in contact or relationship with people like this Samaritan woman and so many others of Jewish and non-Jewish blood alike.

This begins to shed some light on the tense relationship between the two factions.

The source of the enmity between Jews and Samaritans was a dispute about the correct location of the cultic center. The Samaritans built a shrine on Mt. Gerizim during the Persian period and claimed that this shrine, not the Jerusalem Temple, was the proper place of worship. The shrine at Mt. Gerizim was destroyed by Jewish troops in 128 BCE, but the schism between Jews and Samaritans continued.⁶

As the author states in the aside, “Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.” However, little did either group know, this meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well would be the beginning of their sharing a savior in Jesus Christ.

While the woman is still focused on “what has traditionally been the state of relations between Jews and Samaritans, Jesus moves on to beginning the process of introducing himself to the woman as being the Son of God and ultimately the only person that can change the status quo for everyone. Jesus, who is both fully human and fully

⁵ George Corrigan. Friarmusings. At the well: some background, accessed September 30, 2016, <https://friarmusings.wordpress.com/2017/03/14/at-the-well-some-background/>

⁶ Gail R. O'Day, *John*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 9, ed Leander E. Keck, et. al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 565.

divine shifts in His dialogue with the woman to a more spiritual framework than previously used at the outset of their exchange. He makes reference to His power to provide the woman with “living water” that which will not only refresh her but also restore her to right relationship with God and consequently enable her to be in the position where she never thirsts again. The woman acknowledges that the man doesn’t have the necessary tools needed to gain water from the well, without realizing that Jesus is referring to Himself as the well and His Spirit as living water. He invites the woman into a relationship with Him that will never dry up or leave in a place where she will be parched. It is a relationship that will continue to flow as water does throughout the course of her entire existence.

The woman is instantly interested in the water that Jesus is referencing. It has a different appeal to it than the water she came to the well to draw for her basic day-to-day needs of drinking, cooking, cleaning or bathing. This water has serious implication that could change the course of her life. She is curious about the origins of the water and even more about the man who is offering it to her. The Samaritan Woman makes inquiry of Jesus’ credentials wanting to see if He could back up his claims of what He could do by evidence of what He had already done. Interestingly, she cites Jacob as the ancestor who provided the well and while she herself is not Jewish, it supports Josephus’s claims that Samaritans tended to ascribe to the Jewish faith and ancestry. Jesus poetically illustrates the difference between the water that is available at this particular well and the water that He is offering which is available anywhere to anyone who is willing to put their trust and ultimately their lives in His hands. He describes the water He is offering as water that doesn’t get depleted. It in fact has a self-replenishing factor to it, where it

recognizes when an individual is running low and gives them what they need to be rejuvenated. Not only does Jesus acknowledge the life giving qualities of the water, which He is providing, but also the eternal life qualities as well. Jesus points out that not only does the water which He alone has the power to supply offer an opportunity for individuals' lives to be changed in the here and now, but also for the rest of eternity as they prepare to return to God.

The woman's response to Jesus was an emphatic request for the water that He was offering. She had heard enough about what it could do and recognizes that it had the power to provide her with everything that she had previously been in search of either recently or throughout her life. She expressed her desire to no longer be thirsty again which speaks to a yearning from within her soul that goes well beyond a physical thirst that could be cured with a few sips of water. She also talks about the desire to not have to keep coming to the well to draw water. While we don't know exactly how long her trek was to draw water, one could assume that the well was in a somewhat central location for all the members of the community to come and draw from. Yet, we don't know the physical condition of the woman, how far along she is in age, or the atmospheric conditions of the weather or terrain that she has to travel in order to get to the well. We do know however that water is heavy and that this and any of the other aforementioned factors being taken into consideration could cause the journey to and from the well to be one that is quite strenuous and possibly even traumatic.

Out of nowhere, Jesus seemingly changes the entire direction of the conversation by telling the woman to go and get her husband and then to return. It is unclear if Jesus is testing the woman to see if she is willing to do what is necessary to enter into right

relationship which includes acknowledgement of one's sins or if he is falling back on the patriarchal expectations of the society that require men to be at the head of household and would have forbidden Jesus as male from speaking to another man's wife in public.

However, the latter loses its importance as the woman openly engages in an honest conversation with Jesus about the former. The woman doesn't mix words, but clearly states, "I do not have a husband." She identifies herself as being unmarried. Jesus gives her credit for her honesty, but then pushes back by further illustrating facts that the woman did not articulate. He points out that the woman has actually had five husbands to date and the man she is currently living with is not her husband. Now this may raise a number of cultural and religious concerns for the reader. Has this woman been divorced or has she been widowed, which resulted in the multiple marriages? Is the man she is living with now someone she is ineligible to marry or vice-versa? Is the man that she is living with now someone who she is caring for because of the condition of his health? Has the man she is living with taken her in because he recognized she had nowhere else to go? All these questions and probably a great deal more are up for consideration as you look at the fact presented by the woman and Jesus. The woman does not expect Jesus to have the information He does about her personal life and so she immediately assumes Him to be a prophet. For the woman this seems to be enough not to engage Jesus in any further conversation regarding her life as she probably assumes he already knows everything worth knowing about her, even the things that she had surely intended to keep private.

The woman then shifts the conversation and engages Jesus in a dialogue about worship. She is concerned about the restrictions that have been put upon her people with

regards to the location and possibly other conditions around worship. She states that Jesus as a “prophet” had stated, “worship must take place in Jerusalem”. Since this is their first meeting and Jesus has not had any prior mentions of worship in their discourse, it can be assumed that other prophets of the day and time have made mention of Jerusalem being the place where worship must occur. However, Jesus is quick to respond by letting the woman know that a day and time is approaching when worship won’t take place in the mountain where her ancestors had historically worshipped or in Jerusalem where the prophets of old had mandated that worship take place. Jesus acknowledges the lack of original relationship between the Samaritans and the God they are worshipping and that of the relationship between the Jews and the same God. Jesus makes these comparisons for the purpose of setting up His bottom line, which is essentially that it doesn’t matter who you are, where you are from, or where you do the worshipping of God, as long as you do it from a sincerity of heart. Jesus acknowledges that the time is coming where this is the only thing that will matter. In fact, Jesus goes on further to say that this is all that really matters to God at the present time. God has a desire for people who are going to worship God to do it in “spirit and in truth”. It is a requirement for it to be done out of faithful, loving obedience and not out of nonchalant unintentional habit. The latter shows a lack of disrespect and disregard for who God is in the life of God’s people. The former shows an appreciation and earnest commitment to accountability amongst true believers.

The longer the conversation goes on, the more trusting the woman becomes of Jesus as she openly shares her faith. She expresses her knowledge of the coming of the Messiah and what that will mean not only for her, but people everywhere. She makes

reference to Jesus' task of proclaiming the fullness of God and an understanding of Creation to humanity. As she is speaking of these things, Jesus then confirms His identity to the woman, that He is in fact the Christ.

As Jesus is talking with the woman the disciples arrive and break up the discourse on faith Jesus was having with the woman. The disciples are reportedly astonished that Jesus is seen in public with this woman, much less carrying on a conversation with her due to the fact that she is a woman and also a Samaritan. The narrator highlights some likely questions the disciples probably had about Jesus' interaction with the woman, but also clearly points out that not one of the disciples was brave enough to ask them of Jesus. They were still very aware of the fact that Jesus was the Messiah and that if He broke the "societal protocol" of the day, there must be a very good reason for his doing so. The woman uses the arrival of the disciples not as a chance to run and hide, but as a chance to run and tell others about the powerful exchange she has had with Jesus and how it has impacted her life. She is also more inclined to the possibilities that Jesus might actually be the Messiah and goes to share this with the people in the city. The response is one that is overwhelming and the people decide to seek out this Messiah for themselves to experience the same blessings that the woman had.

The disciples who had left Jesus to go and find food knew what state they left Him in and were adamant about his need to partake of nourishment. It can be assumed a number of hours have passed since they departed in search of food and possibly even days since Jesus had had food. They are clearly concerned about His well-being and urge him to eat at this time. Jesus who appears to have been invigorated by this transformative conversation with the woman at the well continues on His deeply spiritual discourse, in

which he had been engaging the woman and beings to address the disciples. He lets them know, “He has food that they knew nothing about.” While the disciples believe Jesus is talking about physical food, he was talking about spiritual food that is necessary for believers to regularly feast upon in order to make it through life. Jesus talks about obedience to God and doing the things that are pleasing in God’s sight and bring glory to God’s name. Jesus alludes to the fact that this requires daily service to God through ministry unto God’s people. Jesus implores them that the time to do this is now. He makes the analogy to waiting for the time to harvest crops, but acknowledges that there are crops (i.e. people) that were planted by someone else and the time has come for disciples to come alongside them and pluck them up so that they can be used for the continued work of the kingdom. Jesus talks about the overlapping responsibility of disciples and how we must work together...each one doing his part, even if the work you start doesn’t get finished by you, it is a trust in the spirit of God that it will be completed.

The passage closes with individuals coming to investigate the information the Samaritan woman had shared with them regarding her experience with Jesus. The people requested that Jesus give them time to experience what the woman had over the course of a few days. As Jesus complies with their request, lives are changed and their personal belief then transcends the word of mouth about Jesus because they have experienced Him for themselves. They identify Jesus for who he is and that is “the Savior of the world.”

Overarching Issues

Race

Angela Onwuachi-Willig, professor of law at the University of Iowa College of

Law argues the following about race:

Race is not biological. It is a social construct. There is no gene or cluster of genes common to all blacks or all whites. Were race “real” in the genetic sense, racial classifications for individuals would remain constant across boundaries. Yet, a person who could be categorized as black in the United States might be considered white in Brazil or colored in South Africa. Like race, racial identity can be fluid. How one perceives her racial identity can shift with experience and time, and not simply for those who are multiracial. These shifts in racial identity can end in categories that our society, which insists on the rigidity of race, has not even yet defined.⁷

While this may speak to the broader and emerging understanding of race as it should be, the harsh reality for blacks, whites and other races, just like it was Jews and Samaritan more than two thousand years ago, is an issue that arises out of what we see on the outside. Race for many people today is driven by the outward appearance of individuals or groups of individuals and notions derived over time that may be true about a few, but certainly cannot be made into a generality for all. It remains to this day one of the leading causes of division in countries around the world. It has been the source of keeping people afraid to trust, care, listen and simply love one another for far too long. As a result it is often used as a means for inciting fear and rage in one race towards another or all other races. As in the case of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, their outward appearances caused them to pass judgment and make up their minds about one

⁷ Angela Onwuachi-Willig. “Race and Racial Identity Are Social Constructs.” *New York Times*, September 6, 2016, accessed October 11, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/06/16/how-fluid-is-racial-identity/race-and-racial-identity-are-social-constructs>.

another prior to any conversation being held and this is the heart of our race-related issues today. We can't make up our minds as to who an individual is based on external observations. It is a must that we go beyond that layers of skin complexion to understand the commonalities of their hearts.

Gender

While it is clear that we were both made in the image of God, it is clear that woman being formed from the rib of a man still causes a complex of inferiority to exist with regards to the sexes. Whether we are speaking from a biblical point of view or a secular point of view, there are still huge disparities that are present with regard to how women are treated versus how men are treated.

If you were to reflect back on our history, we see that women have always gotten the short end of the stick or a raw deal. From the very beginning, they have been viewed as property belonging to a man. Without a man, they were deemed as a burden and unless they were able to provide men with what they need, a child to keep the man's lineage going, then there were of no use to the man. The story of the woman at the well shows a clear inequality with how women were viewed in the eyes of society in comparison to that of a man. The woman in this text is often looked at with what today's society would call, "side-eye". Judgment is being passed on her the moment it comes to light that she has had multiple husbands and is currently living with a man to whom she is not married. Most initial reads of the text go straight to a place of condemnation wondering, "How could this woman be so loose?" "Why can't she seem to keep a man?"

“What did she do to make those men leave her?” None of the common initial hypotheses lean into a theory that points to maybe it was something going on with the men.

Women are still classified as weak and helpless without a man and when a woman who is strong steps up and is secure in her femininity without a man, she is perceived as overbearing or aggressive. We must get to the place where we see women not as fragile “damsels in distress” that need to be protected or rescued, but as our equals in the advancement of everyone and at times, our better equipped counterparts.

Religion

If you want to see people at odds, challenge what they believe. We have been at war as God’s people more times over what we believe than anything else and chief among these beliefs is our understanding of who God is and how we as human beings are called to be in relationship with that God. Religion is the set of doctrinal standards that a particular group ascribes to and incorporates into their daily lives. While it is more about how we relate to God, it also is about how we relate to one another as God’s children. While it is about ensuring that we don’t purposely fall victim to sin, it is also about God’s grace that is available to all of us. Unfortunately, like every other area of life, we all have a different perception of how we are called to live out our religious responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is holding one another accountable. As we seek to hold one another accountable, often times we find ourselves trying to ensure that our neighbors lives a Godly life. However, we don’t always use the godliest of tones, language, looks or other mediums to convey the message that is needed.

We must remember that we all have experienced God differently based on our relationship with God. Thus, we must not be judgmental or confrontational with our neighbors if their interaction yields a response that ours does not. We must seek to see the God in one another, even if at times it seems as if the individual is void of God altogether. In actuality, that is exactly the means by which God interacts with us; seeing the best in us and giving us a chance to improve when the worst appears to be calling all the shots.

Conclusion

The gift of scripture is our guiding light as we seek to find our way in the world. For believers and non-believers alike who have found themselves on the fringes of life, the one reuniting factor is the love of God. Through God's Word we find that there is a place for us where we can go and seek refuge from the ups and downs of our existence. Often times we find that getting back to this place is a long and arduous journey. Yet, it is not a journey that we have to travel by ourselves. God is with us every step of the way and this is the hope that we as the church have to offer the rest of the world. Sadly, there are times when we don't represent this factor in the best way that we can and consequently many stay outside the bounds of God's presence for longer than they need to.

The biblical account from the Book of Psalms tells the story of far too many believers who used to be extremely close to God. Yet, through various circumstances, some within their control and others that are not, they have found themselves disconnected and looking for a way to get back into the fold. While we are all in

fractured relationships with God that are only made right through Jesus Christ, many are unaware of the grace that is available to them to begin the process of repairing the rift and beginning to fully live again. We as the church must serve as ambassadors to the amazing and radical love that exists through Jesus Christ. We must encourage our brothers and sisters that the best way for them to experience wholeness in the midst of the brokenness of their lives is to reconnect to God. It is not an act that is off the table for them. It is in fact the only non-negotiable item before us as we seek to ensure stability, serenity and security.

The biblical account of John 4 confirms to consciousness that no matter where we have been or what we have done, our pasts ultimately have no authority in our presents and certainly not our futures. God is a God who meets us right where we are and forgives us instantaneously for where we were. The text paints the picture of the reassuring good news God's people needs to hear and begin to live into. So many brothers and sisters have failed to walk into their better selves because of an inability to see that a "better" was actually available to them. The text illustrates the fact that Jesus cares enough about us to not just overlook our scars, but to look into them and heal the place of our internal injury for our external well-being.

Not only does the Samaritan woman's account show us what God can do for one individual, but it also shows the impact it can have on a community and a culture. As she runs to tell what the Lord has done for her, her witness becomes compelling enough to get others motivated to check it out for themselves. This woman, who once wouldn't even come to the well to draw water for her day-to-day needs because of fear of ridicule

from the other women is now running free to declare the end of her captivity to anyone who will listen.

These biblical passages represent the heart of what Seeing Many in Our Mirrors is all about. Seeing Many In Our Mirrors will provide opportunities for God's people on the margins to be freed up to be part of what God is doing at the center of the faith community. It will allow individuals to have a safe place to be authentically themselves and be open to how God's spirit convicts them from that point forward. Life Design Worship will present the story of so many who have been ignored, cast aside and excluded from not only society but also the church to come back into the fold and experience God in the way that was originally intended, without restrictions for one and all.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In his book, *Doing Church History*, Gordon L. Heath acknowledges “the common human condition” as one the most practical reasons for why church history should be studied. Heath references Machiavelli, who states,

Whoever wishes to foresee the future must consult the past: for human events ever resemble those of preceding times. This arises from the fact that they are produced by men who ever have been, and ever shall be, animated by the same passions, and thus they necessarily have the same results.¹

Thus, the major things that drive us as human beings do not change over the course of time. They remain a constant and consequently will continue to have a major impact on our decisions and the realities that these decisions inevitably will yield. With respect to our faith, it is incumbent upon us as keepers of the faith, those who have been entrusted with the responsibility of carrying the message to the least, last and lost to do so knowing as much about the struggles and successes of our forebears.

The Church’s history is one that is both marvelous and messy all in the same memory. While our focus is often to lean more into the positive nature of the church, we must also be aware of its negative practices that have caused fear, pain, embarrassment,

¹Gordon L. Heath, *Doing Church History*. (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008), 25.

ridicule and in many cases even death to avoid their continuation in the life of the church today.

With this in mind, I have chosen to reflect upon the practice of excommunication of individuals and groups of individuals in the life of the church. While this is a practice that is not widely used in the church of today, it is a practice that many Christian fellowships use to support their reasoning and rationale of choosing to eliminate those with conscientious objections to doctrines, dogma, beliefs, rituals and practices of the church.

As we look at the Church of today, it is clear that when we as believers are unable to agree on critical issues of the faith, the course of action most preferred is to exclude those who aren't inline with the majority instead of seeking to understand how individuals arrive at view points different from the commonly held point of view. Some of the major areas where this is prevalent today is still in the debate of whether or not women should be allowed to pastor, whether or not couples of the same gender should be allowed to marry and serve in the life of the church and how we as human beings are called to tend to Creation, just to name a few.

Through this historical look at excommunication in the life of the church, I will define excommunication, examine various grounds for excommunication, review major examples of excommunication in church history, talk about the last impacts it has had on the church as a whole and the lingering effects that still exist today. I will also point out how Life Design Worship seeks to be a model that can reverse the effects of "church hurt" that exists from practices such as excommunication and ultimately begin the process of healing and elimination of similar practices in the next generation of believers.

What is Excommunication?

“Excommunication is an ecclesiastical censure imposed by competent authority which excludes those subjected to it from the communion of the faithful and imposes on them other deprivations and disabilities.” (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Excommunication” [accessed November 28, 2016, Logos Bible Software])

Essentially, excommunication is the formal process by which the church under the direction of its leadership, denies persons of faith access to participation in the life of the church, especially with regards to its major activities, such as but not limited to, Holy Communion. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church goes on to state,

It does not profess to extend to the union of the soul with God, since that union is held to depend on the immediate effect of sanctifying grace and to be unaffected by any act of the Church. Hence it is not impossible for [an individual] to be excommunicated and yet to be and remain in a state of grace.

With the understanding that grace is God’s unmerited favor in our lives, it is not difficult to see how man and not God could apply such an egregious sanction. God is the God of grace, always extending it to God’s people. We are people of grace but never extending it to one another.

Excommunication as it was imposed upon individuals and groups varied in degrees dependent largely upon the actions or perceived threat to the faith by the powers imposing the excommunication. Some excommunication might restrict an individual from the central acts of the faith such as the sacrament of Holy Communion or serving in clerical office. At the opposite end of the spectrum excommunication might cut someone off from the faith community all together, disallowing any interaction between the person or persons being excommunicated and other members of the faith community.

Several analysts of excommunication deem it to be more corrective in nature than punitive.

It is also a medicinal rather than a vindictive penalty, being intended, not so much to punish the culprit, as to correct him and bring him back to the path of righteousness. It necessarily, therefore, contemplates the future, either to prevent the recurrence of certain culpable acts that have grievous external consequences, or, more especially, to induce the delinquent to satisfy the obligations incurred by [their] offense.²

The hope is that an individual or group of individuals, through excommunication will begin to miss out on the benefits of the faith those who are in full communion have and will in turn stop whatever behavior resulted in their excommunication. There less of a desire to punish someone to the point of no return and more of goal to provide them with the worst possible experience of being on the outside looking in, so that there is a substantial enough change in the individual or group to seek the forgiveness of the Church. This methodology for imposing discipline in the life of the church lends itself to others bearing witness and making a conscious decision to not engage in similar behavior that led to excommunication of others.

A major example in history of this practice working is in the instance of the Emperor Theodosius and Ambrose of Milan. Theodosius led vengeful attack against Greece in 390 killing several thousand of the townspeople and striking fear in the hearts of others. Upon hearing of this,

Ambrose stood at the doors of the church and would not allow Theodosius to enter. He grabbed his purple robe and in the presence of his congregation said, ‘Stand back! A man defiled by sin, and with hand imbrued with blood unjustly shed is not worthy, without repentance, to enter within these sacred precincts, or partake of the holy mysteries.’ Ambrose condemned Theodosius as an unrepentant sinner for his ordering of the massacre in Greece, and prevented him

²*Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Excommunication”, accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05678a.htm>

from taking the Lord's Supper with God's people. What this amounted to was excommunication. (Bennett, 189)

This bold gesture was not for the purpose of embarrassing Theodosius, but moreover for the conviction of his heart with the hopes of changing the direction of his life. This is one of the cases of excommunication in the course of history that appears to have served its implied purpose.

Finally Theodosius realized, he must go to Milan himself and face Ambrose's wrath if he wanted to be restored to the church... 'I do not attack the laws laid down, I do not seek wrongfully to cross the sacred threshold; but ask you to loose my bond, to take into account the mercy of our common Lord, and not to shut against me a door which our master has opened for all them that repent. (Bennett, 190)

Excommunication has its roots embedded in the early Church. Since its inception, the Church has sought to preserve the faith at all costs, even at the expense of those who are said to be devout believers. Any attempt at compromising the faith through word or deed was met with consequences by the party that was in violation.

While excommunication ranks first among ecclesiastical censures, it existed long before any such classification arose. From the earliest days of the Christian society it was the chief (if not the only) ecclesiastical penalty for laymen. Subsequently, when ecclesiastical discipline allowed clerics more easily to resume their ministry, the ancient deposition became suspension; thenceforth, even clerics were subject to excommunication, by which they lost at once their rights as Christians and as clerics. Both laymen and clerics were henceforth threatened or punished with excommunication for offences that became daily more definite and numerous, particularly for refusing obedience either to special ecclesiastical precepts or the general laws of the Church. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*)

According to Question XXI: Of the Definition, Congruity and Cause of Excommunication in the Summa Theologica,

When a man enters the Church by Baptism, he is admitted to two things, viz. the body of the faithful and the participation of the sacraments; and this latter presupposes the former, since the faithful are united together in the participation of the sacraments. Consequently a person may be expelled from the Church in two ways. First by being deprived merely of the participation of the sacraments,

and this is the minor excommunication. Secondly, by being deprived of both, and this is the major excommunication, of which the above is the definition.

The bottom line is that excommunication causes a person of the faith to be separated from other persons of faith and acts of faith that help to keep that individual in right relationship with God. Thus, the irony of the practice of excommunication is that the very thing you are trying to improve, an individual's relationship with God is the very thing you put at risk by placing said individual out of reach from the Church that is to keep him or her accountable to the faith.

Grounds for Excommunication

Excommunication was established for the primary purposes of realigning individuals or groups of individuals with Church doctrine and dogma. Those that were unyielding in the continuation of behavior that were in contrast to the Church's longstanding belief were threatened with excommunication and given an opportunity to change before the process was actually carried out.

The most common reason for an individual or group being excommunicated was for heresy. A heresy is the formal denial or doubt of any defined doctrine of the Catholic faith. (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s.v. "Excommunication" [accessed November 28, 2016, Logos Bible Software]) The Oxford Dictionary of the Christ Church further states,

In the early centuries heresy was mainly a matter of erroneous attempts to understand the nature of the Person of Christ. These heresies were condemned at the ecumenical Councils. After the Church had become a highly structured and incidentally wealthy institution, many of the heretical movements were inspired by a desire to return to what was seen as the simplicity of the apostolic Church.

Thus, the practice of excommunicating individuals or groups based on so-called, “heretical” statements is questionable. It raises the issues as to whether or not individuals being charged with such offenses were actually guilty of going against the Church or simply not going along with individuals who had taken it in a completely different direction than what it was originally intended. And while excommunication was certainly bad enough, those who were persistent in their desire to see the Church return to days of old were eventually put to death causing there to be a rise in martyrs of the faith from the days of the early apostles until modernity. Several of the high profile excommunications that occurred as the Church was gaining in powerful and financial means was due to an overwhelming discomfort amongst those who felt the Church was lining its pockets instead of lining the hearts of the masses.

Beyond heresy the individuals or groups could be excommunicated from the Church for sin. Among the major items commonly acknowledged as grounds for excommunication were abortion, the termination of a pregnancy by choice rather than natural causes and congruity, which is marrying and consummation of a marriage or engaging in sexual relations with a blood relative or someone given the status of a blood relative (i.e. a sister, daughter, or father’s wife). The later is the modern day equivalent of incest.

Noteworthy Excommunications throughout History

While the number of excommunications throughout history cannot be accurately documented, there have been several noteworthy excommunications of laity and clergy. One of the more prominent individuals to be excommunicated was Martin Luther. Luther

was a German monk and theologian who around the 16th century began to call into question some of the church's practices.

By 1517, [Luther] began to use his insight to criticize one of the more problematic aspects of late medieval Catholicism, the indulgence system. Indulgences, in theory, were based upon the belief that even a forgiven sin still carried a penalty that had to be addressed through penance. Defenders of indulgences claimed that the church possessed the power to remit these penalties and indulgence was the means. By doing a designated good work of the church, the penalty of a sin could be removed. (Mullin, 122)

Luther's focus on the indulgence system put the backs of many clergy person's against the wall because they had been abusing the system by taking advantage of those who had "sinned" against God and the church through "selling" them forgiveness.

Furthermore, on the practical level, indulgences were not only granted but sold, and their sale became an important source of ecclesiastical revenue. To finance the rebuilding of St. Peter's in Rome, Pope Leo X issued a license or permission to sell indulgences. (Mullin, 122)

The system caused many to spend what little money they had with hopes of their infractions being forgiven by their local parish pastor or the area bishop. Luther's boldness in calling the public's attention to this abuse of the clergy did not leave him in a favorable light with the Church. Yet, Luther still continued to right the wrongs of an entity, which was becoming largely overrun by clergy corruption all the way up to the papacy.

The matter of indulgences and a series of other issues Luther was wrestling with compelled him to nail his popular propositions known as the "Ninety-five Theses" to the door of the cathedral at Wittenberg. In a series of debates, culminating with one at Leipzig in 1519, Luther's protagonist successfully shifted the debate from indulgences to the authority of the church, and forced Luther to express doubts about the authority of ecumenical councils. As a result, in 1520, he found himself condemned for heresy by the bull *Exsurge Domine*. (Mullins, 122)

Luther used his excommunication as an opportunity to continue to seek the overall reform of the Church. He is widely regarded as the central figure of the Protestant

Reformation, which would spread like wildfire leading to a number of denomination branches out of the root of Catholicism.

There have been numerous notable lay people as well known to have been excommunicated for various offenses against the church. Henry VIII of England, who famously married six times in hopes of securing a male heir that did not manifest from his first wife, sought a divorce, which went against Catholic Church law. He was excommunicated in 1533 and officially promulgated by Pope Paul III in 1538. Napoleon Bonaparte, the Emperor of France, was excommunicated in 1809 for ordering the annexation of Rome and a long laundry list of orders that were in opposition to the papacy under Pope Pius VII.

Impacts of Excommunication on the Church

Excommunication was not permanent. If an individual or group of individuals were repentant, they could be restored to communion with the Church. Yet, the long lasting effects of being restricted from the key attributes of one's faith can be devastating and traumatic enough to cause an individual to reconsider their allegiance to the faith. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia,

If we consider only its nature, excommunication has no degrees: it simply deprives clerics and laymen of all their rights in Christian society, which total effect takes on a visible shape in details proportionate in number to the rights or advantages of which the excommunicated cleric or layman has been deprived. The effects of excommunication must, however, be considered in relation also to the rest of the faithful. From this point of view arise certain differences according to the various classes of excommunicated persons. These differences were not introduced out of regard for the excommunicated, rather for the sake of the faithful. The latter would suffer serious inconveniences if the nullity of all acts performed by excommunicated clerics were rigidly maintained. They would also be exposed to grievous perplexities of conscience if they were strictly obliged to avoid all intercourse, even profane, with the excommunicated. Hence the practical

rule for interpreting the effects of excommunication: severity as regards the excommunicated, but mildness for the faithful.

As believers, we have an obligation to our fellow brothers and sisters.

Excommunication does not fully allow us to hold those who have fallen into sin accountable for their return to the faith. While the church sees it as a means for inward reflection and rediscovery of the tenants of the faith, it does not take into account that there may have been something within an individual to cause him or her to go astray in the first place. Excommunication in practice does allow prayer for those who are outside of the fellowship of the church, but does not lend itself to guided interaction that is necessary for helping an individual get back on track. By contrast, it essentially leaves the excommunicated to party to his or her on devices in hopes without actual helps of getting that person back in right relationship with God.

Withstanding that there have been legitimate cases for discipline in the Church that ultimately led to excommunication as a last resort, there is still the ever-present reality that exists where people are excommunicated for no reason whatsoever.

An excommunication is said to be null when it is invalid because of some intrinsic or essential defect, e.g. when the person inflicting it has no jurisdiction, when the motive of the excommunication is manifestly incorrect and inconsistent, or when the excommunication is essentially defective in form. Excommunication is said to be unjust when, though valid, it is wrongfully applied to a person really innocent but believed to be guilty. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*)

The Church has been willing to some degree to acknowledge the faultiness of a practice that is subject to error to human oversight, but only to the extent that it does not compromise the Church as a whole or cause the practice of excommunication to be invalidated across the board.

Innocent III formally admits the possibility of this conflict. Some persons, he says, may be free in the eyes of God but bound in the eyes of the Church; vice

versa, some may be free in the eyes of the Church but bound in the eyes of God: for God's judgment is based on the very truth itself, whereas that of the Church is based on arguments and presumptions which are sometimes erroneous. He concludes that the chain by which the sinner is bound in the sight of God is loosed by remission of the fault committed, whereas that which binds him in the sight of the Church is severed only by removal of the sentence. Consequently, a person unjustly excommunicated is in the same state as the justly excommunicated sinner who has repented and recovered the grace of God; he has not forfeited internal communion with the Church and God can bestow upon him all necessary spiritual help. However, while seeking to prove his innocence, the censured person is meanwhile bound to obey legitimate authority and to behave as one under the ban of excommunication, until he is rehabilitated or absolved. Such a case seems practically impossible nowadays. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*)

While this seems as an acknowledgment of the unjust treatment, it does little in the way of vindicating the individual who has been out of fellowship with the Church and no doubt judged, ostracized and caused to always be held in question by the other members of the faith community.

An Agent of Healing

For the Church, absolution by proper authority is what returns the individual to fellowship with the Church. But it is not enough to simply say an individual's sins are forgiven and they can return to the fellowship of other believers. There must be a process in place that helps to go back and allow healing to begin in the heart of the people who have been excommunicated and in turn for forgiveness to take root towards those who turned their backs on them in the first place.

Today, many have suffered hurt at the hands of the very Church that once welcomed them in and told them that no matter what there was a place for them amongst the believers. The impacts have been tremendous causing many a generation to have

been pushed away from the Church and consequently to stay away from the faith. This is not who we are in the Church of Jesus Christ.

One of the purposes of the Harlem Renaissance Project is to allow individuals a sacred space where they can express the sentiments of their heart through mediums that best represent their life story and reconnect them with the God of their existence.

Worship hasn't always been successful at this, yet it is this purpose for which it was intended. There is no greater acknowledgement of the pain of separation from the people of God and the institution established to represent the character of God, which is love, forgiveness, peace, and joy than being able to see this expressed through worship.

Through the song and the dance, the revelation of one who was lost in sin or the vindication of one who was unjustly accused is manifested and a true sense of freedom is experienced by all.

One of the major consequences of excommunication is the loss of participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Holy Communion is central to the worship experience as the Church comes together in community to remember the sacrifice of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who was born so that humanity might experience life in the way God originally intended. How fitting it is to see the dramatic reenactment of Christ's suffering so that we might live as one and to remind us to never allow any grievance or difference to divide us again. How powerful it would be to hear words of one who has been pushed to the margins by the church be set to poetry and spoken with power as the absolved individual reclaims their freedom to be one with their brothers and sisters in Christ. The Harlem Renaissance seeks to give voice to the disenfranchised and let them know that God loves them just as they are and we as Christ's body, the church, are

committed to doing the same in spite of what may place us at odds on the surface...at our core...where it matters, we are one.

Conclusion

Our earliest understanding of the church is derived from the Second Chapter of the Book of Acts, where the biblical account details that “All believers were gathered together in one place and were on one accord”. Interestingly enough, the biblical text clarifies that people were from a number of different places with a multiplicity of native tongues, however everyone understood one another. As the reader travels further through the verses of this chapter, we are clear that this is where the modern day church was formed. There was preaching, teaching, searching of the Scriptures, breaking of bread and sharing of possessions so that no one person or group was in lack or disadvantaged. While it does not say that they always agreed, they saw the well being of the group as of greater importance to the collective than individual perspectives or views. While there is nothing to say that these individual perspectives and views were non-existent, most likely they were a deviation from the original Gospel and consequently led to the many shifts, rifts and ultimately splits in the Church throughout the course of history.

As a result, when individuals did not agree with the policies and procedures established by the existing church, they were deemed as heretics and given the option to either recant their statements or be excommunicated from the church all together. Excommunication was the means by which members of the church were essentially cut off from the fellowship of other believers and denied participation in the key aspects of the faith especially with regards to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. It was believed

that any deviation from the faith as the majority understood it was an attempt to undermine it or destroy it all together.

We have seen evidence of the pain this has caused individuals and groups of individuals throughout the course of history. Many have given up on the faith all together. Many have even lost their lives. The larger question this begs is what do we have to show for presence and persistence of excommunication throughout the ages? Has it made us as the Church stronger and less susceptible to questions, doubts or opposition internally as well as externally, or has it weakened our witness in the world to those who were simply looking for a place to fully embrace who God created them to be without being sent away because they didn't meet all of the metrics set forth by the measuring body?

While the practice of excommunication is not in as wide of use in modern day, it did help to shape the path of the Church Universal throughout the ages. We as God's people must look for ways in which we can address our differences and keep individuals in continuous fellowship with the Church, understanding that we need them as much as they need us. It must be our practice to come alongside those who have gone astray and help them get back to the place where they are not only keeping the faith, but modeling for others to draw closer to God through their lives. It is our duty as people of God to stand alongside our brothers and sisters and not allow anything to separate us from them, for separation from one another is in many ways separation from God.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

My primary theological concern is of an ecclesiological nature. In my ministry context people's understanding of the church is more closely tied to that of a building from the physical standpoint and liturgy from a worship standpoint. The building overtime has become the frame of reference for individuals when speaking of the "church" and consequently the congregation's focus in recent years has been largely dealing with its upkeep and maintenance. By the same token, when speaking of the "church" the frame of reference is also heavily related to what takes place in the sanctuary on Sunday morning during the worship experience. For many if not most in my context, this has become the extent of what "church" is all about. As long as these two items are present and do so to the satisfaction of the congregation that already exists, then these individuals are experiencing the fullness of what the church is suppose to be.

However, there must first be a revisiting of what the church was actually intended to be. We must be clear about how the church came into being and thus, we must lean more closely into our relationship with the one for whom the church was modeled: Jesus Christ. We must spend adequate time reexamining his life's work, which ultimately culminated in his death. We must look at the impressionable marks that were made on the early followers of Christ who would go on to become the church's founders. Equally

important, we must examine the impact the church made on the societies they founded to see how members of these communities responded over time. We must look at how we have moved away from the values of the early church and created a narrative that our brand of Christ, as we see him through a multiplicity of lenses, comes to an understanding of how this shapes the perception of our actions in those on the outside looking in. With respect to the actions of the church, we must be clear about what we do and why we do it, knowing that there is a greater goal in mind than ourselves. We must be able to evaluate the relevancy of the church as we are living it out now by the results we expect it to yield from its original purpose of making disciples for the betterment of all creation.

Christian Theologian, Walter Rauschenbusch, who played a key role in bringing the Social Gospel Movement to light during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries argued that, "Whoever uncouples the religious and the social life has not understood Jesus. Whoever sets any bounds for the reconstructive power of the religious life over the social relations and institutions of men, to that extent denies the faith of the Master."¹ In other words, there is no way any individual of faith claiming to be a true follower of Jesus Christ can see their spiritual life separate from their social life. The true believer must reach a place where the real measure of their faith is inextricably tied to how they respond to the social ills of their day and age. Yet, this has not been the case because believers have shifted from pursuit of the kingdom of God and settled for participation in “church”. Rauschenbusch states, “Through a combination of causes, the name and idea

¹Wikipedia, Walter Raussenbusch, accessed March 20, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Rauschenbusch

of 'the Kingdom' began to be displaced by the name and idea of 'the Church' in preaching, literature, and theological thought of the Church."²

German theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed strongly that the Church was Christ existing in community. For Bonhoeffer, the two could in no way ever be separate. According to Bonhoeffer, "Christianity could never be merely intellectual theory, doctrine divorced from life, or mystical emotion, but always it must be responsible, obedient action, the discipleship of Christ in every situation of concrete everyday life, personal and public."³ Thus, we who are part of Christ's body known as the church have an inescapable obligation to be in regular relationship with the community around us. Our detachment from community is ultimately a detachment from the God we say we believe in.

What is often problematic for us in our ability to see the Church and community as inextricably intertwined is lack of willingness to see ourselves in others or them in us.

The Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman says,

...That meaningful and creative experiences shared between people can be more compelling than all of the faiths, fears, concepts, ideologies, and prejudices that divide; and if these experiences can be multiplied and sustained over a sufficient duration of time, then any barrier that separates one person from another can be undermined and eliminated. We were sure that the ground of such meaningful experiences could be provided by the widest possible associations around common interest and common concerns.⁴

For Thurman, we must come to a place where we are willing to see our commonalities as the common denominator in our mutual existence over and against the differences, which

²Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1917), 132.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), 9.

⁴ Luther E. Smith, Jr., *Howard Thurman Essential Writings*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 99.

may be present. Thurman refers to this necessary process for every individual who must co-exist in community with others as the “search for common ground”.

As one reaches the place known as common ground they are able to truly embrace what the Rev. Dr. Martin L King, Jr. would refer to as beloved community. Beloved community is a universal concept that must be embraced for us to reach a place of collective harmony. According to King, “This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one’s tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men.” Ultimately, love must be the guiding principle for our interaction and understanding of one another. It is through love that we will be led to a barrierless sharing of life together.

Tracing the theological views of Rauschenbusch, Bonhoeffer, Thurman and King will lay the foundational groundwork necessary for my project as I seek to help the church move from a place of gathering for personal edification to sharing space and time for collective transformation. These four theologians do an excellent job at helping us to be clear about the ecclesiological task before us in light of what the world is hungering and thirsting after in this present age. As I unpack their work it will become evident that the Church must be on the front lines of cultivating change for those inside and outside of her four walls.

Walter Rauschenbusch

Walter Rauschenbusch was one the most prominent theologians of our time. His thinking was most notably shaped by a notion of the Kingdom of God. “His father had taught him that the ideals of Christianity were not perpetuated through the ecclesiastical

perpetuation of the church, but in the way that the church manifested itself as a godly assembly of the converted, living in the midst of a sinful world.”⁵ Rauschenbusch would allow this teaching to be the primary force in the cultivation of all that he would later espouse regarding the Church’s relationship to the world. With respect to the social crisis of his day and time and that, which still persists today, Rauschenbusch felt a greater awareness of equality would help to get us closer to the Kingdom of God. "The sense of equality is the only basis for Christian morality. Healthful human relations seem to run only on horizontal lines. Consequently true love always seeks to create a level."⁶Based on Rauschenbusch's assertion it should be the practice of the believer stemming from the place of love they have for God to demonstrate the fullness of that love by bringing their brother or sister to a place of equality. Thus, if someone is in pain and you are healed, the desire of your heart based on your faith should be to want to see them at a place of healing. This then makes it incumbent upon the true believer to act in a manner that affords this opportunity or at the bare minimum aids in the process of this transition from pain to healing.

For Rauschenbusch, the Church has a very important role that only it could play with respect to the rest of creation. "The Church is to be the incarnation of the Christ-spirit on earth, the organized conscience of Christendom. It should be swiftest to awaken to every undeserved suffering, bravest to speak against every wrong, and strongest to rally the moral forces of the community against everything that threatens the better life

⁵ Christopher H. Evans, *The Kingdom Is Always but Coming: A Life of Walter Rauschenbusch*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 75.

⁶ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Know Press, 1991), 247-248.

among [people]."⁷If for no other reason than our commitment to the cause of Christ the Church must recognize the social imperative that is upon her to reach out to the least, the last and the lost as well as the greatest, the first and the found so that no one feels as though they are excluded from what Jesus died to offer to all. We must not only share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but we must make it come alive in real, sometimes tangible, but always meaningful ways. He further states, "The organized Church is a great social institution, deeply rooted in the common life of humanity, and if other human life about it suffers through some permanent evil, the Church is bound to suffer with it."⁸

The Church's greatness is a falsity if it does not seek to utilize the power it has been endowed with by Christ to bring about change in the condition of the lives of the people in whose company she is readily visible. If she is more inwardly focused with policies and procedure, pomp and circumstance than programs that pull people out the pit of despair, then she is ultimately resigning herself to join its current inhabitants.

While the primary work of the church in recent years has shifted to hoping people will grace their pews and then they can begin the soul-saving work necessary to get people into heaven, Rauschenbusch would argue that this is too little too late. It must be the work that is done on a daily basis in the streets, at the grocery store, the gas station, at someone's cubicle or around the water cooler to truly impact and change lives for the better. "Thus the churches have an interest at stake in the prosperity, physical elasticity, mental efficiency, and leisure time of the people."⁹The Church must regularly ask the question, "What is at stake?" And then resolve herself that the answer is and will always

⁷ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 287

⁸ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 287

⁹ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 300.

be God's people. The church does not get a free pass, an option to bow out or be conspicuous by her absence on the front lines of making a difference in the lives of men, women, boy and girls. "Other organizations may conceivably be indifferent when confronted with the chronic or acute poverty of our cities. The Christian Church cannot. The very name 'Christian' would turn into an indictment if it did not concern itself in the situation in some way."¹⁰ How dare the Church turn a blind eye and still claim to be followers of Christ? The irony is too blatant to simply go unchecked. "Clubs and fraternal societies can pick their material; the Church cannot. It must take in all sorts and conditions of men, and has a special call to see out and draw in the most abandoned and lost. It has to take the material furnished to it by secular society."¹¹ An honest critique of many of our churches is that often times they pick and choose which people they want to minister to. They pick and choose which people they want to love. They very quickly forget that there was no "picking" involved when God decided to choose them. God simply chose to be in relationship with us all through Jesus Christ.

Human nature is the raw material for the Christian character. The spirit of Christ working in the healing of man's spirit is to elevate the aims, ennoble the motives and intensify the affections. This process is never complete. The Christian is always in the making. In the same way human society is the raw material for Christian society. The spirit of Christ is to hallow all the natural relations of men and give them a divine significance and value. This process, too, is never complete. The kingdom of God is always coming.¹²

For Rauschenbusch we must always be about the business of playing our part as

the Church, the arm of God in helping to bring the Kingdom of God into fruition for people. It is not a work that we can negate or think that we have completed simply

¹⁰ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 304.

¹¹ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 306.

¹² Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 308.

because we are in the fold. Moreover, it is a work that we must work until we are called home by God from our labor to reward. The Church is not our destination. It is instead a means by which we travel, picking up those who have lost their way along the journey and providing them with a place where they can safely reorient themselves to God's plan for their lives. This is the Kingdom of God lived out in Beloved Community.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer ascribed to this belief as well claiming that the true awareness of our responsibility to the community came out of our relationship with Jesus Christ. In essence there is no way that we can say we are in Christ and not be in community with our brothers or sisters. It is a reminder of what the word of God tells us in 1 John 4:20, "If someone says, 'I love God,' but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, who we cannot?" Our hatred towards others may not manifest itself in vitriolic terms of slanderous words or actions, however, it is sometimes as basic as our inaction toward one that is clearly in need which signals our lack of care or concern; and it places our love for one another in question. This in turn ultimately places our love for God in question or at least our clear understanding of the love that God has for us on the table for a second look.

In his earlier works, Bonhoeffer spent a great deal of time fleshing out the correlation to Christ and the community. "A concept of God is always conceived in relation to a concept of person and a concept of a community of persons. Whenever one

thinks of a concept of God, it is done in relation to person and community of persons.”¹³

Our revelation of God is made clear through our individual human experiences, which are shared with one another for the purposes of gaining further clarity or insight as to what we have learned about God. For the church, specifically the “Black Church” in America, the most common example of this is where individuals would stand and give their testimony regarding what God had done for them personally in a very public setting. It serves as a means of encouragement for those who bore witness to what was shared and provided those who heard with a sense of assurance that if God could do it for one, God can do it for all.

Yet, Bonhoeffer raises the issue that we did not get to our present state of “us and them” mentality that is often used today between the Church and community. Our inability to see our commonalities stems from the presence of sin and the ensuing brokenness that was inflicted on all of Creation at the time of the fall and then ensued with subsequent generation of community thereafter. In referencing the original plan for Creation in light of the original sin, Bonhoeffer shared this thought:

Whereas the previous spirit-form grew out of love, the fall replaced love with selfishness. This gave rise to the break in immediate community with God, and likewise in human community. With this change of direction the whole spiritual orientation of humanity was altered.¹⁴

Our churches, because they are comprised of beings who are still becoming, tend to have a proclivity to approach those who have not reached the same level of self-perceived sanctification, with disdain and distance. While there is a verbal cry that goes

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctum Communion: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 34.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctum Communion*, 107.

out looking for people to join her ranks, it is a cry that far too often is deaf to the cry of those looking for healing and hope on the outside. Consequently, the formula that is often utilized in attracting, welcoming and retaining those coming in is not a successful one. In fact often times it is one that does more harm than good because it is one that looks for those coming in to instantaneously conform to the established norms of the institution rather than recognizing that there are some things about the institution that may not be conducive for that individual's growth and development as a child of God. The reason for this according to Bonhoeffer, "Whereas in the primal state the relation among human beings is one of giving, in the sinful state it is purely demanding. Every person exists in complete, voluntary isolation; everyone lives their own life, rather than all living the same life in God."¹⁵ Thus, an "I've got mine and you've got yours to get" spirit has evolved and infiltrated the minds of even men and women of the faith compromising their ability to truly extend hospitality to people and effectively minister the Gospel in a way that will bring about transformation in people's lives.

This notion can only be lived out as we seek to fully embrace the relationship of Christ to the Church. For Bonhoeffer,

The relation of Christ to the church is twofold. Christ is the foundation, the cornerstone, the pioneer, the master builder. But Christ is also at all times a real presence for the church, for it is Christ's body, and the people are members of this body, or members of Christ himself. This means that the church is at one already complete and still in the process of growing.¹⁶

As we go through this process of growth and revelation into what the Church was called to be, we must look at the ways in which we have not been coexisting and how that

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctum Communion*, 108.

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctum Communion*, 139.

has halted our ability to move forward in the true sense of community. In his work, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, Bonhoeffer states, “It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians.”¹⁷ We receive a gift in living among one another, but it is more than just living among one another that we are called to do. We are called to be in relationship with one another just as we are in relationship with Jesus Christ, who is the means by which we are brought back into right relationship with the Father. As Christians we share in the reconnecting with God through Christ’s salvific work on the Cross. It is the common denominator that binds us together in the faith and should always be remembered as we go throughout life with one another. There is joy in knowing that we don’t have to go through life by ourselves. There are others who like us have sinned, messed up and fallen down multiple times in this life, but have been forgiven, picked up and restored by a gracious God.

As we seek to understand our need for one another, we must be clear that the greatest gift we provide our brothers and sisters in Christ is strength when they are weak, peace when they are in chaos, and love when they feel hated by the world. According to Bonhoeffer,

God has willed that we should seek and find His living in the witness of [another], the mouth of a [human being]. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian to speak God’s word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother as the bearer and proclaimer of salvation.¹⁸

¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1954), 17.

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 23.

It is the ultimate reminder that we do not have to go through this life by ourselves and if we do, it is in many ways, a choice that we are making and not one that God has made on our behalf. God desires for us to be in relationship with each other, thus if we choose to be separate from others, we are in some part denying the presence of God, which is part of every human being. And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. As such, God permits them to meet together and gives them community.”¹⁹ Even our most basic interactions with our brothers and sisters are opportunities bestowed upon us by God for the betterment of our individual lives, but more importantly for the common good of us all.

We spend a great deal of our time focused on our differences and highlight things that separate us instead of uniting us. Often times this is done out of fear of the unknown and an unwillingness to get to know that which might enhance life or even more drastically, change life completely. By nature we tend to avoid change and if the thought is that coming together with another who is in some way, no matter how insignificant it may be, different from us then we tend to steer clear of these persons at all costs. Yet, Bonhoeffer would argue, “The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and His work become the one and only thing that is vital between us.”²⁰

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 23.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26.

Howard Thurman

Howard Thurman's life work was in pursuit of an ideal that we as God's people, no matter how different we are, deserve to be in community with one another. Thurman believed that it was more of a disservice to ourselves and the human race to in any way alienate one's self from others because of surface level incongruity. For Thurman, we as people need only focus on the things that unite us. Thurman would argue that this is most readily found in God and can be lived out through the Church.

The sense of Oneness that comes from religious experience is understood by Thurman to be the reality that God intends for creation. Religious experience discloses the underlying unity of reality and God's desire that life be lived in resonance with such unity. The term Howard Thurman most frequently uses to characterize this unity is 'community'.²¹

Thurman believed, "Community is a gift from God. We honor this gift when we live in community with respect and care for its members and all creation. Stewardship of community is thus a fundamental spiritual discipline."²² Our care for the community as a whole and in turn its members must be so embedded within us that it becomes second nature. We should not have to wait for a brother or sister to say that they are in trouble in order for us to reach out to them and let them know we are there. We should regularly be checking on one another in order to build a relationship of trust and mutual accountability. Thus, you develop patterns of regularity and norms of behavior. There is an expectation that you will see the elderly brother that lives in the corner house every morning around 10 a.m. sitting on his porch. If several days go by and there are no signs of him, then it is evident to you that something is not right based on the regularly established behavior.

²¹ Luther E. Smith, Jr., *Howard Thurman Essential Writings*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 88.

²² Smith, Jr., *Howard Thurman Essential Writings*, 89.

There is an expectation that the two teenage girls who live on your block will walk on your side of the street and stop to talk with you on their way to work. Yet, if they cross over to the other side of the street and only offer a hand wave from a distance then it becomes evident that something has changed causing there to be a variation in the norms of behavior. The spiritual discipline of community must be one where there is a great deal of attentiveness to not only those around you, but that which surrounds them in order to gain insight as to how that might have an impact on the community at-large.

Though sometimes living in community with one another may be uncomfortable and cause problems to arise that we would not like to deal with on our own, there is always a strange peace that comes when actively living in community with one another -- especially with respect to the community of believers that exists in the Church.

The profoundest disclosure in the religious experience is the awareness that the individual is not alone. What he discovers as being true and valid for himself must at last be a universal experience, or else it ultimately loses all of its personal significance. His experience is personal, private, but in no sense exclusive. All of the vision of God and holiness which he experiences, he must achieve in the context of social situation by which his day-by-day life is defined. What is disclosed in this religious experience, he must define in community. That which God shareth with him, he must inspire his fellows to see for themselves.²³

Through our relationship with God, it is revealed to us in the darkest hours that we are not alone. The religious experience helps us to see the big picture and understand there are others who are like us, but moreover, like Christ and sometimes must suffer. We are reminded of this and strengthened in our resolve to endure, not just for ourselves, but also as a source of encouragement to others who are still suffering, showing them that they can survive and live a life that thrives beyond their present experience.

²³ Smith, Jr., *Howard Thurman Essential Writings*, 96.

Dr. Thurman's continued search for understanding as to what brings us to the undeniable place where we need each other has been well documented. For Thurman it all boiled down to whether or not it is inherent within us to need one another. In *The Search for Common Ground*, he states,

In other words, my search has led me to seek answers to the insistent question: Is the pull toward community both within myself and the world of men indigenous to life, or is it a mirage, a delusion? To state the question a little differently: Is there some basis external to know ones-self for the hopes and dreams of harmonious relations between men and whatever, kind, state, or condition? Does the validity of the whole-making tendency in human life rest finally upon empirical sanction, or is it really against the drift, the movement of life as we experience it?²⁴

Thurman's quest is one that seeks to understand whether or not it is second nature to want to be in community with one another or if it is something that has been created only in the hearts, minds and spirits of the few. The desire to be in community is one that stems from the moment we enter the world. Our life source from the very beginning is tied to another. From the time of our delivery, it has become a commonly held belief that the quicker a baby experiences the touch of their parents, the quicker they bond and the stronger that bond will be. Thus, our inclination is to be in close proximity to others. Yet, often time there are experiences along the way throughout the course of our lives that cause us to be hurt by other human beings. In our hurt, we tend to put up walls and steer clear of not only the individuals who inflicted the initial hurt, but anyone else who either has the potential to hurt us in the same manner again or just people in general. Consequently, many who do not readily have the innate desire to be in community with others are simply products of their environment. If it has been an environment of pain then it is to be expected that individuals will remove themselves from those or similar

²⁴ Smith, Jr., *Howard Thurman Essential Writings*, 96.

environments in the future. Therefore, to Thurman's point we must work to intentionally cultivate relationships with one another that help to build new community and establish it as a safe place where pain may occur but healing and wholeness are available.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

One of Howard Thurman's protégés, Martin Luther King, Jr., believed that this environment is what is known as the Beloved Community. Lewis V. Baldwin, in his book, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The Cultural Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, shares the following account of how King's most dominant thought was shaped:

King's experiences of community and non-community in the segregated South had profound influence on his vision of and quest for world community. As stated previously, his earliest understanding of and search for community began in Atlanta, Georgia, within the contexts of his family environment, the fellowship of the black church, and the large black community.²⁵

By the end of King's life, the country was in a state of chaos and confusion. Violence was the order of the day. The nation was ripped in two and to some degree probably more pieces. The government wasn't on the same page by any stretch of the imagination at either end of Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House to the Capitol. Thus, they could not be the unifying instrument to bring the nation back together again. For years King had been preaching love and non-violence, but had not let up in his quest for freedom and equality of all peoples. His theology had continued to evolve, yet the constant for his was that we did not need to be divided, but more to a place where we could live together as one people in community. While Dr. King did not have the

²⁵ Lewis V. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The Cultural Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Mineapolis: Ausburg Fortress, 1992), 245-246.

opportunity to see that in his lifetime, one of his latter works published in the aftermath of his assassination is one of his greatest legacies to date.

In response to the stalemate King felt the movement was at during that day he wrote:

People struggling from the depths of society have not been equipped with the knowledge of the science of social change. Only when they break out of the fog of self-denigration can they begin to discover the forms of action that influence events. They can then embark on social experimentation with their own strengths to generate the kind of power that shapes basic decisions.²⁶

In other words, the longer the hand of oppression is upon a people, the more comfortably they settle into the seat of complacency with where they are and resign themselves to the misnomer that this is where they will always be. However, if they are able to simply rise out of that seat, steady themselves long enough to take a stand in the name of whatever it is they desire, (i.e. change, opportunity, justice, peace) then they can take that first faithful step forward in that direction. One step provides the mind with an awareness that a second step just might be possible and thus the individual continues until either no more steps can be taken, which may simply require re-routing or until their destination has finally been reached.

Those who have long been on the outside looking in must take some ownership in wanting to be part of community. They must first be clear that they have just as much right to be present as those who are already there and appear to be the self-appointed gatekeepers. Once they are clear they must make those first faithful steps --not to show that they are worthy of entry, because this is already determined by their humanity. Instead, it should be a step that shows that they desire entry and because of their

²⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 138

humanity they have something of value to contribute and enhance the community as a whole. For Dr. King none of us truly has a choice in the matter of whether or not we will belong to community or not. By virtue of the fact that we are here, sharing the same air and living in the same space we must co-exist. According to King,

We have inherited a large house, a great ‘world house’ in which we have to live tighter—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest who, because we can never live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.²⁷

Our work, therefore, must be intentional in the pursuit of this community where all are accepted simply because no one of us has the right to do any rejecting. “All inhabitants of the globe are now neighbors. This world-wide neighborhood has been brought into being largely as a result of the modern scientific and technological revolutions.”²⁸ While science and technology were just beginning to blossom five decades ago at the time of King’s writing, the same cannot be said today. As the global community we have made so many strides in those fields that it is inconceivable that we still have so far to go to develop basic communication between peoples. Yet, King believed that the discontent of being ostracized, oppressed and openly disregarded by other human beings is enough to light a fire under people to say, “No more, we are all one and so let us not only act like it but live by it.”²⁹

All over the world, like a fever, freedom is spreading in the wildest liberation movement in history. The great masses of people are determined to end the exploitation of their races and lands. They are wake and moving toward their

²⁷ King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*, 167.

²⁸ King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*, 167-168.

²⁹ King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*, 168.

goal like a tidal wave. You can hear them rumbling in every village street, on the docks, in the houses, among students, in the churches and at political meetings.³⁰

Thus, if it has occurred before, it must occur again, and the church, the propagator of love, must be on the front lines of drawing people into community by being a model of what that community looks like by opening her doors and directing her focus outward instead of inward.

Conclusion

The theologies of Rauschenbusch, Bonhoeffer, Thurman and King have left an undeniable mark on my thinking as to how we as the Church must reclaim our place at the forefront for cultivating community. The work is not an easy work, but there is a social imperative that calls us out of the comfort of our pews and into the streets to care for our brothers and sisters the way that we were cared for along the way. This will require us to change our way of thinking and be open to people who on the surface don't look like us, talk like us, walk like us, think like us or even worship God like us. Yet we must do so in a way that lets them know that those differences are merely superficial things that make up the beautiful tapestry called God's Creation. We must be the voice that declares at our core we are all the same. This is the path that we must take in order to bring people to Beloved Community.

"King's conception of the Beloved Community is best described as a transformed and regenerated human society."³¹ With this in mind I am clear about the aims of my work in my project, "Seeing Many in Our Mirrors: A Model for Transforming High

³⁰ King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*, 168.

³¹ Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King Jr.*, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1998), 130.

Steeple Churches into Community Revitalization Centers.” In order for the church to be transformed as a whole, the individuals who comprise it, must first begin to see a portion of themselves in the men, women, boys and girls who they often times attempt to keep out. The Church must come to a place where it acknowledges the similarities as having far greater importance than the differences, which may be readily visible. It will require people to take an honest introspective look at themselves, where they have been and how they arrived at where they are now. Once this occurs they will be at a more humble place ready to recognize that others are on the same journey they were once on and thus allows them to be in a posture of willingness to come along side to help rather than push away and hinder.

As the emphasis upon interrelatedness suggests, King’s conception of the Beloved Community assumed a theme mentioned throughout these pages, the social nature of human existence. The phrase that King used to express this theme was “the solidarity of the human family.” Everyone who is even slightly familiar with the words, “We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”³²

Thus, the sooner we recognize how connected we are, the sooner we will stop impacting the future of our brothers and sisters because it is clear that their future is inextricably tied to our own.

Once the Church makes strides in this direction, we will be surprised at the great awakening that will occur not only in our houses of worship on Sunday mornings, but all week long. The people who are being impacted will take what they receive there and share it everywhere they go. This is the type of contagiousness that Jesus intended to occur. His very life was about showing love in such a way that brought every person not only closer to God, but one another. When our church acknowledges the barriers, which

³² Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community*, 131.

have been erected over time and begin the process of tearing them down, they will burst wide open with people hungry for a word that is not just powerfully preached, but more importantly, authentically lived. This is what it means to see many in our mirrors and welcome all you see because Christ first welcomed you.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

A true testament to the work of the Church in the years to come is not creating new programs just for the sake of having programs. It is in fact, taking time to adequately reflect upon the work that has already been done and revisit the ground that has already been covered by countless men and women of the Gospel; and to access the strides that have either been achieved or the course corrections that still need to be made with respect to bringing the Church to a place where she lives out her call of making disciples of Jesus Christ, impacting lives, and transforming the world.

In this paper, I will begin by unpacking the specific type of ministry that is required because of my context. I will then utilize the numerous blessings we have already been given as gifts to the church by practitioners who have served tirelessly in their ministry settings and brought about a change of heart amongst peoples and modeled ways of doing church differently and more effectively. These individuals through careful observation of the local congregation and surrounding communities were able to analyze the fruitfulness of their ministries and when necessary they successfully implemented a change to their respective local congregation's missions and programming. The changes allowed the churches to reach a broader base of people that more accurately reflected the totality of the Body of Christ.

As my particular context has a population that is aging rapidly with little or no replacement for individuals who have either passed on or crossed over into the next decade, there is also a need to look at best practices for connecting with younger demographics. With that being said, I will utilize practices that help to engage a more youthful demographic for the purposes of establishing continuity from one generation to the next and hopefully eliminate the large divide that exists in many of our churches. There is a noticeable absence of the young adult population beginning in the teenage years and going into the early forties for some congregations.

Lastly, I will utilize the discipline of sociology to further explore the shifts in my congregation and those like mine to bring us to a place where there is a need for an intentional reorientation toward beloved community. I will look at the trends in this field to further understand how an individual's environment impacts the choices they make in life, but more specifically with regards to the impact that religious identification plays in other choices he or she may make. I will look at how religion is viewed from a sociological perspective and review the works of leading theorists of the day and their views of religion's relevancy in our society.

Theoretical Foundations in Ministry Practice

As my ministry context takes place in Baltimore, Maryland, it must be clear that there is a serious difference from doing ministry in an urban setting than in a suburban or rural setting. Each setting is unique and has a particular set of factors that must be taken into account. Thus, it is imperative that individuals truly understand where they are

working and consequently with whom.. Urban ministry is one that requires individuals who are deeply concerned with the plight of brothers and sisters in the city and will go where the people are, be it in front of the liquor store and carryout in the hood or in front of city hall or the coffee house downtown. People from all walks of life intersect in the city. They are passing one another at every corner and often times with similar issues that are just dressed up in different clothes.

As individuals pass one another, they are also passing buildings that historically have been known as houses of worship. The church has had a longstanding reputation for being a place where those who are wearing the burdens of their everyday lives can come inside, lay them down and get some inspiration to return to daily lives with a renewed perspective of hope. Yet, in recent years (due to a decline in attendance by many because of the church's inability to remain relevant through its Sunday morning worship or social programs that address the conditions of the community rather than the comfort of the existing congregation) churches in urban centers have seen a rise in closures with many others barely hanging on.

Connecting the Church to its Community

Approximately twenty-five years ago, the Rev. Dr. Joseph W. Daniels, Jr. was pastoring a church in Washington, DC that was in decline. Daniels, who at the time had heard the call of God to pastor, was sent to this aging faith community, which was barely able to pay the bills and keep the grass cut from week to week, much less attract new members to rejuvenate this faith community that was barely worshipping twenty people a Sunday. Yet, Daniels who understood people wanted more than just a one hour make -

you-feel- good kind of worship, pushed past the pomp and circumstance of Sunday mornings and stepped into the community to get his finger on the pulse of the neighborhood of the church. Pastor Rudy Rasmus states, “In this first book, *Begging for REAL Church*, Dr. Daniels took a look at the hunger our world has for a relevant experience.”¹

As a student of Dr. Daniels, while pursuing my Masters of Divinity at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, one of our first assignments was to get out in the community where his church, Emory Fellowship (Emory United Methodist Church) was located and talk to the people. The understanding was that a pastor nor the church’s leaders could tell the community what they could do for them and certainly not what they needed unless they had a clear understanding from members of the community as to what those needs entailed. According to Dr. Daniels, it is only through the process of getting into the community and having those initial conversations with residents, business owners and workers alike that you began to get an understanding of the community’s make up. Through these conversations, it eventually becomes clear that some individuals’ names will continue to resurface in conversation. These individuals tend to have a good rapport with the community at large and usually one in this group has gained a reputation as the “mayor of the community.” For Daniels, the “mayor of the community” was someone who perhaps didn’t hold an official elected position in the community, but did have enough respect from the members of the community to be able to get stuff done either with their words or actions. Thus, relationships with these “mayors” are just as important if not more than those of actual elected officials because

¹ Joseph W. Daniels, *The Power of Real: Changing Live. Changing Churches. Changing Communities*. (Washington, DC: Not Just A Curtain Puller, 2011), 15.

often times even with respect to politics, these “mayors” have the power of persuasion based on their credibility as trustworthy, committed servants that have a vested interest in the community as a whole. Moreover, these individuals are able to clearly articulate the needs of the community due to their first hand knowledge or because of the relationship they have managed to establish overtime with members of the community, which ultimately makes them reliable voices when it comes to articulating what matters to the people.

Thus, every pastor or church leader must enter into relationship with those that are keenly astute in all things related to their immediate surroundings. It is not just enough for the church to be present in the community. She must have a presence in the community directly, but until that relationship takes form, indirectly through someone who clearly understands the particular needs of this community. This is because no two communities are the same and in order to impact change in the urban area, the agent of change must know what is specific to that demographic in order to begin the process of bringing the change to pass. For Dr. Joseph Daniels, this involved being relevant. In other words, I cannot address hurt you have today if I’m still talking about the hurt you had a decade ago. I have to update my frame of reference so that the dialogue between us becomes something you can receive for the trauma you are facing now.

In his second undertaking, *The Power of REAL*, Daniels becomes a fully alive practitioner in urban ministry --someone who has a tangible plan for moving churches from what used to be to what is now and from what should be to what could be in light what is now known about the community in which one has been called to serve. The

book brings to life, the story of a church that recognized change was not only necessary for their own vitality but for that of the surrounding community.

“The Fellowship of Used-Tos” was formerly known as the Church of the Trying-to-Stay-Open. The name change had followed major renovations; the members had torn down the shrines and altars of traditionalism, and started building up REAL Church. Before the renovation, no one but the members had even known the church existed. But now, seven years later, people came from near and far to try to figure out how the Fellowship did what it did.²

According to Daniels, there must first be an understanding of what REAL entails.

REAL Church has to do with four elements that work in tandem. When these four are visible and evident within the life of a congregation, that congregation is transforming lives and *being* transformed on a regular basis. People in the congregation and community are being saved from their sins, finding their basic needs met, indentifying with their dreams, and achieving God’s purposes for them. People are sacrificing for the well being of others and discovering they are being blessed so that they might better bless others. When one or more of these elements is absent, transformation becomes much more difficult³

Dr. Daniels states that churches must be REAL. “Being real comes out of our personal Pentecost experience. REAL means we must be relevant. We must be enthusiastic. We must be authentic. We must be loving.”⁴ Thus, we must have had a “real” encounter with the Holy Spirit in our lives and experience transformation for ourselves for others to see something different in us and consequently desire to seek out the same outcome for themselves. In order for people to move past the place where they just hear us and are actually attentively listening to us, we must be speaking their language. We must be saying something that ultimately resonates within them and call them to a place of action. There must be an enthusiasm about how we approach the call

²Daniels, *The Power of Real*, 19.

³Daniels, *The Power of Real*, 27.

⁴Daniels, *The Power of Real*, 37.

on our lives and those we are called to be in ministry with and to. If we are lethargic and uninspiring in our speech and actions, no one will want to follow us, much less come along side of us. Our authenticity must guide us at every turn, because the last thing people want or need is to be in the midst of someone who isn't walking the walk they talk about. We must be as transparent and translucent as possible. Our transparency should be such that we aren't afraid to be open and honest about what we have experienced in our lives and how those experiences have shaped and molded us into the people we now are today. Our translucency should be such that people don't see us but see the light of God that is on the inside of us that brightens the dark spots around our lives, the community at-large or in the greater world sphere. Lastly, love must be in the midst because if not, there is no driving force to keep you going when things arise that makes you want to quit. Every person desires to be loved and to know that they are loved.

While these are the core principles that have guided Daniels's work with the Emory Fellowship, the practicality he and his team approach ministry with are definitely a winning strategy that may be met with opposition at first by some who are used to the old way of doing things. However, the more preaching, teaching and one-to-one conversations had with individuals around the need for change and evidence of the actual results for change, the greater the buy in will be not only from the congregation, but from the community as well.

Several things are made clear as non-negotiable in the process of transforming churches. First and foremost, regular assessing and leveraging the assets of the community is crucial. You must know who and what you are working with in order to get the job done. You need to be intentional about garnering not only the support but also

commitment from people along the way. This work cannot be done alone. It is a team effort that requires the engagement of all the players. Once those individuals have been identified, training is not only necessary but also critical to the success of your endeavor. Training will allow individuals to ensure that every activity is in line with the mission of the church. According to Daniels, “Realignment is necessary under normal driving conditions and critical in more treacherous ones. If we are serious about achieving Christ’s mission in the world, we need to make this an annual habit.”⁵ Dr. Joseph Daniels argues that this is possible for any church as long as you cast a compelling vision. “Vision is more than a bumper sticker. It is the detailed picture of God’s preferred future for our community and congregation. You will find divine vision at the intersection of Leaders’ Purpose, Congregation’s Passion and Community’s Voice.”⁶

In his third offering, *Walking with Nehemiah*, Rev. Dr. Joseph Daniels talks less about the change that will occur in the life of the church and focuses more on what it looks like when a church is able to see the community as the actual congregation. So often there is a mentality, which exists amongst churches where “us” includes the longstanding members of the congregation who we know, love and even if we don’t always see eyes to eye with them, have accepted them as part of the faith community. On the other hand, “they” include everyone outside the four walls of the church, who probably have never attended our worship services, have issues that we can’t understand, are interested in understanding and that we hope never ever grace the steps of our beloved church, because we might actually be forced to deal with them. *Walking with*

⁵Daniels, *The Power of Real*, 326.

⁶Daniels, *The Power of Real*, 343.

Nehemiah pushes back against the inwardly focused model that the church has adopted over the course of the last quarter of a century. This model fosters a return to what the church *used* to be; an outwardly focused model offers the means of grace for one and all.

In the introduction, Daniels states,

One of the greatest challenges the church faces in the twenty-first century is its lack of connection to its community. Far too many churches today have become drive-in, spiritual social clubs and not the agents of community vitality and life transformation they used to be. As a result, communities are suffering, churches are dying, and far too many people are searching for hope in all the wrong places.⁷

Since we know that this was not the way the church was intended to be, we must find our way back. In his book, Daniels utilizes the biblical image of Nehemiah walking and surveying the walls of the city, which lie in ruin as the starting point for us as faith leaders. We must get out there on the ground and survey the pockets of our communities that are in ruin and then respond accordingly. “It isn’t until you know for whom or what your heart breaks that God can reveal where in the community and with whom your ministry needs to be done.”⁸ When we get to the place where we can replace statistics with faces and real life stories then we will be more inclined to help and less apt to hinder or simply hide. When we get to know the widow, the orphan and the stranger, then they no longer hold these places of unfamiliarity in our existence. They become our wives, mothers, aunts or sisters. They become our children. They become our friends. When you have a real relationship with someone, there is no way that you can see them hurting and simply walk away. You are compelled based on your relationship even if you can’t speak a solution to at least stand in solidarity until an acceptable solutions shows up.

⁷ Joseph W. Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah: Your Community is Your Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), XI.

⁸Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 1.

Daniels recommends several things to ensure that the “Nehemiah Walk” yields restoration of the community. First and foremost he shares that “Relational 1:1 Campaigns inside the congregation are an effective way of discovering the heartbreak of the congregation.”⁹ I have personally found these to be extremely informative and a good tool for understanding what issues are important to the life of church members. Daniels goes on to speak of the necessity of bathing the community or that, which has caused heartbreak to enter in prayer. This may seem like a no brainer in the religious context, but it is often times the thing we are less inclined to do because we perceive by virtue of our good intentions that God is automatically on board with our plans and everything is a go. We must pray to ensure that our plans line up with God’s will.

A major portion of the work is recognizing that everybody doesn’t always get on board. Dr. Daniels states,

The leaders of the congregation have to acknowledge the congregation is not all-in with regards to God’s restoration process. The congregation has to decide whether it is going to play church or be the church. Usually at this stage church councils or leadership teams have to have a “come to Jesus” meeting with regards to what the congregation is about and what the congregation is going to be known for. Will the congregation be known for mending the hearts of the marginalized in the community or will it be known as a Christian social club that gathers for an hour or two every Sunday morning?¹⁰

This powerful question must be answered and more than likely it will be the pivotal part of the church’s ministry that helps it to either take bold steps forward or a comfortable seat in the place of complacency.

⁹Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 14.

¹⁰Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah*, 38.

Leveling the Playing Field Amongst Members of the Church and Community

A radical and innovative faith leader by the name of Pastor Rudy Rasmus began taking the Houston, TX area by storm with his holistic approach to the Gospel some decades ago. Pastor Rasmus did something for the marginalized brothers and sisters of Downtown Houston that had never been done before. He saw them as human beings in need of God's love which needed to be extended by a simple "touch." In his book, *Touch: Pressing Against the Wounds of a Broken World*, Rasmus shares several stories about the varied dynamics of the St. John's UMC, where he pastors. According to Rasmus,

We serve a part of downtown Houston that attracts every segment of society from 150 zip codes—a melting pot of wealthy and powerful, poor and fragile, educated and uneducated, very young and very old, black, white, and brown. For ninety minutes every Sunday, the lines of class distinction disappear and the pews are packed with white-collar professionals, the family next door, the homeless and addicts.¹¹

This serves as a true testament to what it means to live out Beloved Community in the midst of the faithful. For this to work people have to first understand that being part of a faith community that seeks to reach everyone, requires an individual's personal needs to take a backseat to the community as a whole. In other words, when episodes arise in the life of the faith community such as those Rasmus speaks of in his book, where worship gets interrupted because someone comes in off the street either high on drugs or empty on food, members of the faith community cannot be bothered because the Doxology got skipped or morning prayer got cut short. There is an understanding that at the moment

¹¹ Rudy Rasmus, *Touch: Pressing Against the Wounds of a Broken World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 4.

the needs of another brother or sister in Christ may for the moment be a priority that needs to be addressed. As Rasmus states,

And that's what St. John is all about: a sanctuary, a place of safety and freedom for hurting people to be who they are authentically—whether crazed or sick or sad or lonely or desperate or just in need of loving human touch and a little hope.¹²

While issues of this magnitude would startle most other congregations, sending them into a state of panic or fear, this is not the case for St. John's. They are aware of the unique population they have been called to minister to and they do it with little or no question at all other than, "How can I help?" Rasmus shares that the reason this is most often the approach is because, "We have a common denominator of human suffering."¹³ Once people get to a place where they find something in common, the things they don't share seem less important and appear virtually non-existent from that point forward.

Growing the Church through Authentic Relationship Building

Leading church growth specialist, Bob Farr provides us with a refresher course in evangelism with his book, *Get Their Name: Grow Your Church By Building New Relationship*. Farr encourages church members to step outside of their comfort zone leaving behind the familiarity of fellow members and beginning the process of cultivating meaningful relationships with new individuals. For Farr, one of the most important ways to establish these new relationships that had the power to be soul changing and life transformative was to do some "faith sharing." Faith sharing is essentially the willingness of believers to articulate how they came into their relationship with God and

¹²Rasmus, *Touch*, 5.

¹³Rasmus, *Touch*, 6.

in turn be open about how God has been active in their lives. Faith sharing may also include the telling of the many ways in which faith has been tested or in some cases even waned.

The early Methodists knew and practiced this consistently in their class meetings. In every meeting, they were asked the question of accountable discipleship, to which each member of the Wesleyan covenant class would answer: “How goes it with you?” The members of the class shared their personal experience with God and not just their understanding and thinking of God.¹⁴

If we could get back to this level of trust and accountability, it would build our confidence up in such away amongst other believers that we would be emboldened to go out and make new disciples through our witness. However, with the loss of class meetings in many of our churches, believers have lost the forum to share with one another. If you aren’t in the habit of sharing your faith with those who should readily understand your story, it goes without saying that there might be some level of trepidation when it comes to sharing your faith with those who may not understand it upon first hearing your testimony.

Farr makes four observations about the church and its practices over time with regards to how we connect with others.

(1) Inwardly focused churches tend to define and practice evangelism as “reconnecting disconnected church folks.” (2) Outwardly focused churches define and practice evangelism as connecting the unconnected folks to Jesus and then to the church. (3) The pool of church people to connect with is dramatically shrinking while the pool of the unchurched, never-connected population is growing exponentially. This is especially true among the millennial generation. (4) Early denominational movements focused on unconnected folks, while the established churches of the day focused on and supported folks who were already church people when they arrived in America. These movements became institutional over time and they focused on membership rather than discipleship.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bob Farr, *Get Their Name: Growing Your Church by Building New Relationships* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 10.

¹⁵Farr, *Get Their Name*, X.

We must undo the patterns of misguided attempts to grow our churches and return to a practice of growing individuals, their families and their friends as disciples instead of trying to find ways to bring new members. If we do not make this adjustment we will gain new members, but we will not retain them because there is no faith-filled relationship with God keeping them committed and overtime they will exit when programs stop holding their interest.

It is through the process of building real, meaningful relationships that cause people to see that you are deeply invested in their well-being and not what they can bring to your table. The development of a relationship is the critical first step in disciple making. The individual sees your sincerity and earnest attempts at letting them know that they matter and are compelled to want to know what it is that makes you different from others who are looking for something from them in return. There are four steps that we as the church must engage in to make the disciple-making process successful. Step one is moving people from outsiders to guests through prayer, bridge events (activities that aren't directly church focused) and follow-up (reaching back to participants to confirm their experience as positive or negative). Farr shares that step two requires making people who are longer guests feel connected by helping them to get to know other people better or become involved in activities that are tailored toward incorporating them into the family. Step three involves shifting people from being connected to being disciples through intentional faith development that holds them accountable to their own growth with appropriate metrics and supports in place. Lastly, step four involves moving people from discipleship to ambassadorship. Once an individual has the tools he or she needs, it

is not enough for them to simply sit on them. They should then be encouraged to take those tools and reach new people the same way they were reached.

In a previous offering entitled, *Renovate or Die*, Bob Farr offers ten options for congregations to re-engage in mission, another outwardly focused strategy. Farr states, “Renovation is to refurbish, revamp, remodel in a major way, restore, modernize, or reinvent. Renovation is often more expensive, risky and is always extremely hard work.”

It Doesn't Work Without the Next Generation

Church growth strategist David Stark offers several ways in which the church's most unconvinced demographic, millennials, can be reached. Stark shares that "outsider target services" are the way to let this generation know that they matter and that you are prepared to receive them based on their interests. According to Stark, "The Millennial generation, like all digital natives, will always use your website as the front door, even if it is just to find out the time of your church services. You should assume that nearly 100 percent of all outsiders will look at the website first before attending your church."¹⁶ Stark sees the web presence of a church as the "front door" from the perspective of young people. In other words, if they go to a website and information is lacking or its not presented in a way that provides the most necessary and attractive information first, then more than likely these individuals will never grace the actual front door of your church much less sit on your pews. This generation is used to having it all at their fingertips in a moment's notice. If they are limited with what they need to know, that limits their ability to make even the most basic decision as to whether or not they want to give your church a

¹⁶ David Stark, *Reaching Millennials: Proven Methods for Engaging a Younger Generation*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016), 113.

try. It goes to the age-old saying, “First impressions are lasting impressions.” We all making them in different ways, but in order to reach younger people, you have to speak their language.

Stark shares there are other factors involved as well. With regards to the church’s internal ministries; they must be open to outsiders. Individuals need not be on your roles to participate in the activities that you offer in the life of your church from week to week. There needs to be a way of reaching out to people to let them know that, “This isn’t a worship service, but you are welcome to come and be part of this activity that our congregation is hosting.” Folks need to know that they can see what your congregation has to offer before making a full commitment to your church and then later finding out that there is nothing there that meets their respective needs. Stark also shares that ministries that reach out need to be ones that help to engage the next generation in what they are already passionate about: service. Stark recounts the following from David Burstein’s book, *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation is Shaping the Our Worl:*,

The formative years of Millennials have taught them that resilience and adaptability are essential for survival. The 9/11 attacks, school shootings, etc, took place at key moments in their psychological and intellectual development. The events shaped their worldview, making them more focused on trying to solve the big challenges to come.¹⁷

Contrary to popular belief, millennials are less interested in themselves and more interested in making a difference in the lives of others. That is what gives this generation true fulfillment as they have experienced so many devastating things in their life time that have made them ask the internal question, “Is this as good as it gets or can I do something to make it better?” When churches are engaged in that work, millennials are more

¹⁷Stark, *Reaching Millennials*, 144.

inclined to come alongside them and help in the process. When churches are not engaged in such work, they are more inclined not to give churches a second thought and do the work themselves that they feel churches have failed to do.

Theoretical Foundations from Sociology

Human Interaction

Sociologist, Erving Goffman deals with the behavior of human beings when they are face to face with one another. In a day and age when so many people hide behind the text messages that are sent from their smart phones or emails that are sent from their computer, human interaction is becoming almost nonexistent. Although physically in the presence of others, it is becoming more and more common to see people with their noses stuck in an electronic device. Thus, we don't know how to interact with one another the way in which we use to. This makes it increasingly hard to build meaningful relationships that will foster trust and means by which individuals are able to see themselves in others. According to Goffman,

Every person lives in a world of social encounters, involving him either in face-to-face or mediated contact with other participants. In each of these contacts, he tends to take out of what is sometimes called a line—that is, a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself. Regardless of whether a person intends to take a line, he will find that he has done so in effect. The other participants will assume that he has more or less willfully taken a stand, so that if he is to deal with their response to him he must take into consideration the impression they have possibly formed of him.¹⁸

Thus, our interactions with other people lead to an unavoidable drawing of conclusions about where other individuals as well as ourselves stand on a particular topic from things

¹⁸ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior*, (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), 5.

as simple as to whether or not it is a nice day to how someone views the political climate or even whether or not someone believes that God is actually in control. Facial expressions and body language play a big part in helping people draw their conclusions and establish the opinions they will use moving forward.

The Avoidance Factor in Community with those who are Different

We have a tendency to deal differently with people who don't look like us, walk like us, talk like us, think like us, or act like us. Those, whom we can regularly identify as our equals based on their outward appearance or our known internal similarities earn a subconscious place in our hearts and at our proverbial table where they can have voice without fear of ridicule or judgment. However, on the other hand those who do not meet those standards are stigmatized.

According to Gerhard Falk, "The word 'stigma' refers to the branding of slaves in ancient Greece. In American usage, however, it has come to mean the rejection of numerous individuals and often entire groups of people on various grounds."¹⁹ Falk goes on further to state,

Both ascribed and achieved stigma in twenty-first century America are produced by the inability of many of us to live in conformity with the publicly proclaimed norms taught in our schools, through our media, and in informal communication (i.e. gossip and innuendo).²⁰

While Falk addresses several places where this conformity can be learned, it would be an extreme omission not to include the church. The church over the course of time has developed so many practices, which have become norms for the existing congregation.

¹⁹ Gerhard Falk, *Stigma: How We Treat Outsiders*, (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2001), 32.

²⁰ Falk, *Stigma*, 333.

Everything from the way people get up out of their seats during the worship experience to what you serve to eat for events and certain calls and responses to things that are said by others within the four walls have become widely understood and accepted by the Church. Yet, those who have not joined the church's ranks are without knowledge of these items and tend to stand out from those who are knowledgeable. Consequently, they are labeled and find it difficult to become part of the community because of the stigma that now exists.

In *Don't Leave Your Friends Behind*, there is a wonderful account of a mom who expresses the ways in which the her faith community turned around the feelings she had about women with children not always feeling welcome in the life of the church. The mom, Coleen Murphy, shares, "Radical hospitality is about going above and beyond welcoming; it is about making an environment that is welcoming, active, intentional, and impossible to miss."²¹ With respect to how to establish radical hospitality, the following steps are suggested: (1) Name it, (2) Name it again, (3) Be flexible, (4) Keep naming it and (5) Institutionalize it. When there is an absence of something that you know needs to be present and is only missing because of the mindset of the people that are in the midst, there must be an active campaign such as the one talked about by Murphy to bring whatever is missing to pass.

Specifically with regards to people who are missing from the group, you must first verbalize to them that they are welcome and if they don't believe it the first time around, say it again. As you are welcoming people in and do they begin to take you up on your willingness to make room for them at the table or even step aside so they can

²¹ Victoria Law and China Martens, *Don't Leave Your Friends Behind: Concrete Ways to Support Families in Social Justice Movements and Communities*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2012) p. 198-200

come through the doors? You have to be flexible knowing that when they come in they may be coming in with some things you aren't quite familiar with and they will be met with some things they are not quite familiar with. This is no reason to get bent out of shape. This is no reason to start second guessing the original or follow-up invitations. This is time to observe and find ways where common ground can be established in order to truly make them feel welcome. In case people forget what you are striving toward in welcoming others and begin to change their behavior as such to make people feel unwelcome, say it again so that everyone knows, "They are welcome." It should be said to the point where it becomes ingrained in the hearts, minds and spirits of all who are part of the organization. It ought to become second nature and essential institutional policy across the board.

Building Meaningful Community

The authors of *Creating Community Everywhere* paint a vivid image of what community used to look like. This comes out of an understanding that no area is undevelopable and connections amongst people are not impossible if there is a willingness to be part of something bigger than oneself. Shaffer and Anundsen state,

Urban neighborhoods used to be like villages, integrated systems in which people of all ages knew and interacted with one another and in which almost every essential product or service was available, within walking distance. Shop keepers watched out for kids and performed other informal community services. Over the last few decades, corporate franchises have replaced many mom-and-pop operations, and the clerks who staff them feel little connection to the neighborhood.

Discouraged by urban decay and fearful of crime, people who can afford to have fled to homes in the suburbs which, in turn, are becoming sprawling metropolises with crime problems of their own. In these suburban residential enclaves, they

find that neighborly personal contact is often rarer than it was before. Meanwhile, the abandoned centers deteriorate for lack of attention.²²

While the sense of community that existed several generations ago seems to have all but fallen by the wayside, it is clear that all hope is not lost. As long as there are a remnant of people that either remember how things used to be or a group of people that may not know how it used to be but are willing to experience a fellowship with one another that is more intimate than casual hellos or courtesy head nods while walking down the street, there is still an opportunity for us to enter into deeper and more meaningful relationships with one another for the betterment of us all.

In sharing about how a Chattanooga, TN neighborhood was turned around three keys for creating civic community were shared. “First, while sameness was the glue that held traditional communities together, today’s neighborhoods and cities must not only tolerate but embrace diversity.”²³ We must get to the place where we understand that people in many ways are different with us and be at peace with this undeniable and uncontrollable fact. Yet, we must recognize that their differences are purely surface level manifestations of our shared humanity. We see that shared humanity as a common strand that knits us all together in the quilt of life; we can more readily celebrate the unique personhood of our neighbors. “Second, the process by which diverse strands are transformed into a closely woven tapestry is often as important as the resulting programs and projects.”²⁴ In other words, careful skill must be applied to the task of brining peoples together. One cannot simply expect that because we co-exist in the same place

²² Carolyn Shaffer and Kristen Anundsen. *Creating Community Anywhere: Finding Support and Connection in a Fragmented World*, (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigee Books, 1993), 92.

²³ Shaffer and Anundsen, *Creating Community Anywhere*, 102.

²⁴ Shaffer and Anundsen, *Creating Community Anywhere*, 102

that the space will be shared equally with respect. This is something that occurs by the intentionality on the part of all parties involved. “Finally, whether you live in the South Bronx or a city in Tennessee, community happens only when power is shared and individuals take responsibility.”²⁵ Everyone who has a vested interest in the community must be afforded an opportunity to become an equal stakeholder in the community development and journey toward revitalization. There can be no big I’s or little u’s. There must be an acknowledgment that everyone who is present is present because they have something worthwhile to bring.

In their book, *Better Together*, Putnam and Feldstein allow readers a glimpse into how communities have come together across the United States to bring about much needed change in the lives of the people who inhabit them.

You will visit big cities, suburbs, and small towns and meet people engaged in a wide variety of activities. You will see bustling branch libraries in Chicago and an evangelical church in southern California that attracts more than 45,000 members, a middle school in a small town in Wisconsin where sixth graders develop and carry out local improvement projects and a neighborhood of Boston that has rescued itself from catastrophic decline, an arts project that expresses through dance the history and work of a naval shipyard in New Hampshire and activist organization that represents 60,000 families in the Rio Grande Valley. What these and the other undertakings described in this book have in common is that they all involve making connections among people, establishing bonds of trust and understanding, building community. In other words, they all involved creating social capital: developing networks of relationships that weave individuals into groups and communities.²⁶

When you bring people together around a common goal that is bigger than anyone individual it gives them a sense of belonging. They enjoy the work they do together and give their all to ensure the success of whatever they are striving toward.

²⁵ Shaffer and Anundsen, *Creating Community Anywhere*, 102

²⁶ Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 1.

Many of the stories in this book show the positive effects of social capital, the ways that people in relationship can reach goals that would have been far beyond the grasp of individuals in isolation. At the same time, these people enjoy the intrinsic satisfactions of association, of being part of a community.²⁷

What It Means to Be Relational

According to the Senfts, as a people we have become more transactional with one another than relational. Our interactions with other human beings over the course of time have focused more on what we can get out of each other more than how we can simply be present with each other. As a result, we don't know how to interact in a way that allows us to get to know one another and build relationships that extend beyond the boundaries of general greetings.

The problem is what might be called a transactional approach to our interactions with others—our negotiations—acting to serve our needs and desires and placing little value on the quality of interaction with other persons and their well-being—all those moments in our lives when we choose to try to get the best of the situation at the expense of others or to the disregard of others.²⁸

The Seven Ways of Being Relational are, Being Engaged, Being Centered, Being Grounded, Being Clear, Being Generous, Being Humble and Being Kind.

Conclusion

The practitioners I have examined have provided a wealth of knowledge on how to adequately address the wide-spread problem of how to make church relevant enough again to engage people who are not already connected. They have taken approaches that are less gimmick oriented and more heart oriented. Their methodologies have become a true testament to the question, “What is at the heart of the matter?”

²⁷ Putnam and Feldstein, *Better Together*, 2.

²⁸ Louise Phipps Senft and William Senft. *Being Relational: The Seven Ways to Quality Interaction & Lasting Change*, (Deerfield Beach: Health Communications Inc., 2015), 11.

In a day and time when more people have more issues than they can handle, they do not want the church to be a place where their issues are ignored. They want the church to be a place where they can safely acknowledge that they don't have it all together without fear of being judged or admonished. They need to know that not only are they loved and accepted, but that there are people who are willing to support them as they try to navigate the issues of everyday life and that the church will support them where needed along the way.

There is a call from people of all walks of life, but especially from the younger generation for the church to engage them in a real way that helps them to live out their passions for making a positive impact on the world that they live in and will raise their children. It is not a difficult request especially since this is essentially carrying out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet, the criticism of the church is that their focus is on things that have little or no bearing on the life of the world at-large.

Thus, the church must seek methodologies, which embrace the Beloved Community, ones that cause us all to come together and involve ourselves in a work that is greater than ourselves. When people are involved in a work that is greater than they are, they are less focused on what is wrong with their own lives and become more aware of the ways in which they can improve the lives of others. This lifts their spirits, renews their commitments to serve others and enables them to see that in the midst of their focusing on others, evidence of a God who is always focused on them becomes clear as it is lived out through a faith community that has accepted them just as they are and loved them just the same.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Every community is in need of a renaissance; a rebirth of its inner passion to see its inhabitants and institutions which have given it staying power over time, come alive again. Often times a number of issues such as cause some or all of the entities for fall asleep and remain dormant so much so that those who exist in and around them come to assume they are dead. This commonly held assumption amongst major players only leads to the inhabitants and institutions therein getting stuck in a rut that seems virtually impossible to get out of. Yet, with the willingness of inhabitants and institutions to be transformed, all hope is not lost for either. In fact, there lies the potential to awaken not only the spirit of each entity but to also be open to possibilities never experienced or even imagined.

Upon beginning this process of accessing the current issues of the community and inability of one of its longstanding institutions, Union Memorial United Methodist Church to understand these issues due to a lack of connection, our team deemed something needed to be done. It was not that the church did not have a desire to connect with the community, it had simply lost touch with how to do it in an effective manner that would bring about transformation in a meaningful and continuously evolving way as opposed to the temporary and eventually detrimental way.

As with any undertaking where change in results is expected, there necessitates a change in actions or behaviors. When dealing with an institution such as the church that is steeped in tradition, a variety of historical references, best practices for doing ministry and checks and balances with their own individuals contribution of red tape, it goes without saying that it isn't always easy to get everyone on board to participate in moving forward. While the rally cry to support positive efforts is always met with initial applause there are always questions, some of which lead to clarification and participation and the same time others that lead to uncertainty and in many cases a decision to withdraw all together.

A core group of eight to ten faithful individuals, which eventually agreed to serve as my contextual associates, stepped up to the plate availing themselves on a weekly basis to engaging in conversation around the biblical, historical, theological and theoretical foundation for embarking upon a project of this nature. Many of these individuals were inspired initially by a kick-off sermon series entitled, "Ready to Embark", which focused on the need of the church to live into its responsibility of making disciples beyond its four walls. As the contextual associates immersed themselves in an understanding of the foundational imperative of the work that needed to be done, the congregation was also afforded the opportunity to continue to be challenged for over a year, every fifth Sunday by guest scholars who would preach and lecture on the need to be in ministry with the community.

Ultimately, conversation boiled down to a basic understanding of perspective. The church had one view of the community and the community had another of the church. In order to transform the landscape of both, there had to a change in perspective on the

part of both. We deemed it to be easier to begin work with ourselves as members of the institution before putting any unrealistic expectations on members of the community. Thus, we began our prayerful, prophetic push of asking God for guidance, while at the same time declaring that the best days of the community were still ahead and that the church had a vital role to play in ensuring that this was realized.

Methodology

The journey began with my contextual associates and I meeting on a weekly basis to discern the needs of the community and how we as the church could start addressing those needs while at the same time building relationships between members of both entities. This was done primarily through bible study focusing on the two biblical foundation scriptures undergirding my work as well as other supporting biblical narratives. As we continued to engage in fruitful dialogue about the obligation the church had to be an effective witness in the world, it became apparent to us that we needed to gain insight into how the members of our faith community viewed themselves as individuals and ultimately how they perceived themselves in relationship to the surrounding community.

To facilitate the gathering of information with respect to the congregation's perspective, two activities were held. The first activity was entitled "Reflections of Myself" and occurred during the Sunday morning worship experience at the time of the sermon. The sermonic moment set the tone for individuals in the life of the congregation to take a long hard look at self and verbally articulate what they saw beyond physical appearance. Words from Michael Jackson's "The Man In the Mirror" were used to set

the tone and with mirrors present in the sanctuary, members of the congregation were invited to look and share what they saw reflected back being as authentic as possible. This proved to be an extremely powerful moment in the life of our church as members began the often long, uncomfortable, tedious process of pulling back the layers that we tend to cover ourselves up with over time and reveal whom we really are behind the mask. Three individuals were willing to come forward and share with the congregation at-large who they were beyond what most people saw on the surface. The transparency of these three individual opened the doors to further our conversation about the fact that we all have a story that extends far beyond what most people know about us. Following the healthy dialogue that occurred, I concluded the sermonic moment by reminding the congregation, that their stories in many ways mirror that of those who have yet to find their way into a relationship with Jesus Christ or into regular connection with a faith community. This led to further dialogue following the worship experience and in the days ahead from individuals in the life of the church, who shared that they had not taken time to really be open to how people in the community might be similar to them. This intensified my understanding of the work that needed to be done in order to help prepare the congregation for actively engaging with the community in the future. If there was an overwhelming feeling of lack of similarities existing in the minds of the church members, this would need to be unpack and reconstructed in order develop a faith community that was willing to be in relationship with people who on the surface may not look like them, talk like them, think like them or live like them, but who at their core were human just like them.

I sought the assistance of two professional associates with background in sociology to help me understand the interactions of peoples from different groups. This was an extremely affirming time for me as our conversations further substantiated my previously held beliefs that our life experiences over the course of time and our exchanges with people at those key moments not only help us to evolve into who we are, but also determine how we will interact with the next individuals or group we come in contact throughout the rest of our lives. My professional associates offered facilitating a listening session that would help members of the congregation honestly assess how they saw themselves as a faith community and their ability to engage with those beyond the church's four walls. Approximately sixty plus members of the faith community participated in the listening session entitled, "Engaging the Community: A Look in the Mirror of Union Memorial UMC". The Rev. Dr. Clarendia M. Phillips, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Texas A & M, Corpus Christi and The Rev. Dr. Tamara L. Brown, Dean of the College of Juvenile Justice and Psychology led the time of dialogue with the members of Union Memorial.

Following a time of centering several questions were asked to get at the core of what members perceptions were about the community in which the church was located as well as the church itself. The first question asked was, "When you look at the community surrounding Union Memorial, what do you see?" Initial responses to the question gave very surfaced level answers such as, "homes, other church, a lot of young people, crime, abandoned buildings and not a lot of opportunities." However, when pushed further by facilitators, participants began to respond that the lack of city-funded programming contributed to the large number of youth, particularly African-American males, "just

standing around on the corners”. The widely held belief by many in the group although not all was that those standing on the corner with nothing to do were at a greater risk to become involved in criminal activity that contributed to bringing the neighborhood down. The feeling was that if there was something for them to do of a positive nature, this might lessen the chances that they would either become involved in criminal activity. Many of the seniors acknowledge that the awareness of the actual or even presumed criminal activity had created a sense of fear amongst the older generation, making them less likely to engage with the younger generation even for something as simple as saying, “Hello.” Several took the analysis of the community made in the room in another direction seeing the lack of city funded programming as an opening for community developed, implemented and supported activities as that which would fill in the gap and offer an alternative to the youth who by many definitions were either lost or looking simply to belong.

The next conversation, which yielded some very honest but interesting feedback from the congregation, was around how they believed the community around Union Memorial perceived the church to be. Members candidly shared that they felt people thought Union Memorial to be “uppity, cold and closed.” They believed that many felt their environment was “not welcoming or engaging.” Looking around the room as individuals were openly sharing, I observed many heads nodding in agreement of what was being stated by those brave enough to provide this assessment. I was somewhat taken aback by how certain they were about outsiders perceived them in this way and stepped in to inquire why they felt this way. The response floored me to say the least. Several members began to share that even as members of the congregation, they felt

disconnected from the congregation and didn't feel as though it had a family atmosphere that made people come running home. In fact, several members shared that the large reason why membership had declined aside from death was that people who didn't feel the warmth from fellow members eventually left and never returned seeking refuge in the "arms of a more loving church." When pushed to asked if this was the case, "Then why do you continue to comeback?" The response echoed by many, "I'm too old to leave or I've been here to long to start over somewhere else." This further solidified my belief that no amount of outreach or program offerings in the life of this conversation would make a difference in outsiders desire to be part of this faith community until there was first a difference in the attitudes and approaches of the current insider population. There had to first be a change in the hearts of people in order for their interactions with others to become authentically inviting, welcoming affirming of their presence.

The third question asked was with respect to outreach. The facilitations inquired, "How good a job is Union Memorial doing in reaching out to the community right now? The responses to this question varied from person to person. While some felt that "the church had not started the work of reaching out", others felt that they were doing a "fair job, but only because the few that had actually been doing the work were getting tired and running low on ideas." One individual cited the positive feedback that had been received from the community regarding the recently instituted "Asses to Go" Lenten Worship Experience, which takes place outside on Ash Wednesday providing members of the community whose schedules don't allow them to attend a traditional worship experience on this day to receive the impositions of ashes and be offered prayer and personal counsel as they are passing through the neighborhood. An additional

perspective was shared as another individual felt, “The Community just takes what we give but doesn’t ever come back.” The comment led to a new line of questioning by our facilitators who then ask, “So, what?” “Are we to simply stop doing the work of the church because those who are on the receiving end don’t respond the way we want them to?” If so what are our real motives in the first place?” “Are we seeking to make a difference in the lives of the people around us or are we looking only to add more names to our membership roster.” The latter in no way helps us to live out the Great Commission of making disciples.

The fourth and final question asking was one that projected ahead to what the future could be if there was a change in the hearts and minds of the people of Union Memorial in how they saw their role as members of the church. The question asked, “If Union Memorial was doing a great job in reaching out to the community, what would it look like and what would be happening as a result. Members felt that if Union Memorial was doing the best job it could, “we would be fully informed about the needs of the community and the residents would be willingly serve alongside us in ministry.” Additional it was stay that “there would be more children and the visible signs of vitality on the upswing instead of a downward spiral.” Several individuals remarked that, “consistency would be the spirit by which we served the community.”

Dr. Phillips shared that the church must set it sights on being an engaging church. She noted that, “An engaging church does three things really well. They have making disciples as its highest priority, are willing to meet and connect with people where they are, and prioritizes relationships rather than programs.” With that being said, my contextual associates and I began brainstorming on the best way to kick off the process of

bridging the gap between and what we want to be happening. Members of the group thought that due to our lack of presence in the community, an outdoor event would be the best way for us to not only be visible but readily accessible to the people so that we can start building relationships that would help transform the current climate.

I set the atmosphere for our work amongst the congregation at-large with a sermon series that caused the congregation to think critically about what it meant to be in relationship with someone other than themselves and those they believed shared their life experience. The series was entitled Seeing Many in Our Mirrors after the project as feature four parts which were preached back-to-back with two parts being delivered prior to The Harlem Renaissance and the final three parts afterwards.

Implementation

The Harlem Renaissance truly became a labor of love, lived out through the hard work of my contextual associates and their support network that was an outgrowth of several meetings held with key leaders and members of the church at-large to inform them of this community day. The contextual associates were so passionate about the vision that following one meeting, I was asked to prayerfully release the logistical concerns of the day to them with the understanding that they would keep me apprised of any pertinent changes in our originals plans.

Our teams were well organized and although not overstaffed, finely paired to maximize our talents and resources. One team member assumed the role of liaison between us as the City of Baltimore. As having an outdoor event requires a number of different permits, our city liaison, contacted the Office of Parks and Recreation and

secured a contact that walked us through ensuring that we had the proper materials and paperwork to go with them from beginning to end. Another individual volunteered to serve as our community liaison ensuring that elected and non-elected local officials were informed about the event and given an opportunity to be present, extend greetings or send representatives from their respective offices. Another individual stepped up to begin the process of securing vendors to provide a wealth of information to residents of the community and members of our congregation that day. While a big aspect of our day would include entertainment, a member of our team decided to oversee the reaching out to groups that could do demonstrations and performances for the day. I was very concerned about incorporating the community in the day beyond the attendance and shopped the idea of allowing members of the community to be our performers for the day showcasing their talents such as singing, dancing, poetry, painting or spoken word. I felt this would allow members of the community to show one another what they were capable of doing, but also afford the opportunity for others to see the rich blessings that were already in the midst of the community as a whole. Then there was of course the undertaking of feeding an entire community. Our team decided as a whole that the best way to tend this would be selecting food items that were not overly labor intensive and were most economically friendly allowing us the opportunity to feed folks throughout the course of our community day rather than just for an hour, which would have been the case if we had selected an more elaborate meal. There were the basic areas of focus that guided us through the process.

The team held several planning meetings to finalize day of event issues and coordinate a timeline that would help things run as smoothly as possible. Members of the

team gathered early on Saturday morning to help prepare for set-up. Additional volunteers from the church who had signed up in weeks prior were on hand to assist where needed. I also enlisted the services of several friends to provide some additional manpower as our congregation is an aged population and the work for the day was labor intensive with respect to the hauling of tables, chairs and other items for the event. While our liaison with the city had done a wonderful job coordinating times and services to be utilized, even the best-laid plans go astray. The city was over an hour late from their 9:30 am scheduled arrival to deliver tents and constructing the stage where performances were to take place beginning at 11 AM. As it was Saturday morning and city offices were closed, our calls for clarity of what was going on went unanswered. However, there is definitely power in prayer. Following a few deep breaths and requests for God to intervene, I looked up and trucks from Baltimore City were rolling down our street raring to go. The set up of the area in front and on the side of the church took less time than I had anticipated. Our vendors had begun arriving to set up their materials. Our cooks had the grill fired up and ready to receive the endless supply of hotdogs that were on hand. The disc jockey was sending out good musical vibrations on the ones and twos. The only thing missing was the community. In the weeks prior to the Harlem Renaissance, the streets had been blanketed with flyers regarding the event going in every mailbox within in a ten-block radius on multiple occasions. So the question remained why weren't members of the Evergreen Community standing as a sea of people in front of our stage? Didn't they realize that all the hard work, which had been put in to the day, was for them? I could begin to see looks of concern on the faces of our congregants and even some of our team members. I leapt into action with my t-shirt and official event badge on going

block to block yelling that there was free food and entertainment to anyone that could hear me. I noticed a few of my team members joined in. I went as far as I could go stopping at the homes of people who were sitting on their front porches to give them a personal invite to be part of the day's fellowship opportunity. While many shared that they would "check out" the event as it progressed throughout the day, a great deal more struck out after me on foot to ensure that they did not miss the chance to be part of the event. I didn't realize how far I had gotten or how many people I reached, but after while, I looked up and my friends who had come to help with the event had driven to find me, notify me that the turnout had grown and bring me back to the main stage to give the official welcome and opening prayer for the day. Upon my return, I learned that the marching band which was scheduled to be present until later in the afternoon had arrived and was going to march through the neighborhood to help wake the people up who were still on their pre-noon day naps. The marching band proved to be a tremendous blessing-calling people from their beds or breakfast tables to their porches to see what all the noise was all about. As team members and I followed the band through the streets we were on hand to field question from the residents about "What was going on?" "Could they participate?" "Why weren't they made aware of the event sooner?" While I was happy to answer any and all questions, I was somewhat perplexed as to what had happened to the flyers that had come through the weeks before. I shared with the residents that we had in fact been advertising for close to a month only to find out that many members had actually seen the flyer but disregarded it not knowing anything about our church. In essence there was no brand recognition whatsoever to connect the dots of who we were as a faith community to the work we were trying to do in the community. However, our willingness to engage in

conversation with residents began to open up the clearly longstanding closed channels of communication. Additional residents got dressed and made the trek from their porches to the area, which had been blocked off for the day. We were blessed to have a karate demonstration, a mime presentation, a choral concert; dancers and rappers share in with us for the day. In addition, residents were able to register to vote, meet elected officials and candidates running for office, gain information about health programs in the area and register as members of the community association, which had been looking to increase its membership and resident involvement. Hundreds of hotdogs, sodas, waters and chips were distributed to members of the community as they mixed and mingled with the members of Union. Members of the community were asked to fill out a brief survey used to gather information about their knowledge of Union Memorial. For taking the time to complete the survey, individuals were entered into a drawing that took place every hour providing individuals with a gift card and bible every hour on the hour. Individuals were able to enjoy a variety of entertainment on the main stage that included a karate demonstration, a mime presentation, soloists, dancers and our own choir to close out the day. We were also blessed to have from our City Council Member, Councilman John Bullock, some of our clergy partners such as Bishop Robin Blackwell and other organization representatives who brought valuable information about voting, health screenings and even vacation planning. As the day neared an end, it was an all hands on deck effort from the members Union Memorial and the community to get everything packed up and back to where it needed to be. With a great deal of feedback coming from members of the community whom overall thoroughly enjoyed the day, I believe it is safe to say the Harlem Renaissance in and of itself as a huge success. **(SEE APPENDIX A)**

Summary Of Learning

Following any undertaking of this magnitude it is important to sit and take time to reflect on what has occurred. I asked that my contextual associates as well as key leaders in the planning and implementation of the Harlem Renaissance would take a week to reflect on the experience, write down thoughts and be prepared to come together for a debrief session. The purpose of the debrief session was two-fold. First and foremost, I wanted to hear from those who had worked most closely with the event regarding their experience, obstacles faced as well as insights gained that might help us in the future. They also had direct contact with members of the community and I wanted to gain first hand knowledge of what their eyes and ears gleaned from those we were attempting to reach. Secondly, I wanted to hear from our leadership on how they thought this event had impacted the church as a whole and their willingness to engage with the community on a more consistent basis and in more meaningful ways.

Prior to the meeting one of our contextual associates took time to analyze the data that was collected through our surveys. This would be used during our debrief to help chart the way forward as to how we as a congregation would need to adjust who we were to meeting the changing dynamics of the community around us we believed we were called to serve. While we didn't receive as many survey back as we would have liked, the ones we did receive back that were complete and legible provided us with some information that supported some of our long-standing suspicions about how were are perceived by the community at-large. Of individuals who completed the survey, we found that 40% were not connected with a faith community. Of the 60% that acknowledged

being connected to a faith community, 46.67% expressed that due to not having attending worship or activities at their respective faith communities, they were not certain of the condition of their relationship between themselves the pastor and congregation. With respect to Union Memorial, only 40% of the individuals polled been to the church for a worship experience or activity. Interestingly enough another 33.33% acknowledged knowing where the church was located but never having stepped foot inside, while 26.67% had never even heard of the congregation. This was a red flag for the contextual associates, leadership who helped to plan the Harlem Renaissance and myself considering that Union Memorial which sits on the corner of a major intersection and takes up more than half of each block. This led to a conversation that addressed our lack of a visible presence in the community being a major issue that stops people from knowing the church even exists. One individual of the debrief team reminded us of our most recent outreach opportunity where our congregation purchased over 300 hats, gloves and scarves for the neighborhood elementary school. When we went to deliver them to the school several parents inquired about who we were. When we shared that we were from “Union Memorial United Methodist Church at the corners of Harlem and Warwick” parents responded, “I didn’t know anyone was in that particular church.” Another parent remarked, “We thought that church had closed down.” The data only supported the comments that had been made a year earlier and the fact more needed to be done by us as a congregation to increase our ministry of presence in the community. People did not even realize that we were present. Even more interesting is that in January, prior to the Harlem Renaissance occurring; we were displaced from our building up do to a heating issue. While several believed that our lack of presence in the community over the course

of those three months was the reason why our event wasn't more well attended, I pushed back challenging the statement with the premise that even when we were worshipping in our church on Sunday to Sunday basis and having activities throughout the course of the week, members of the community still didn't realize we were there because most of our programming happened behind our four-walls with no real intentionality in reaching out to involved our neighbors. Our church had a fallen into a rut of existing for the members and even this was losing its appeal amongst our membership.

When we continued our review of the survey a much-needed discussion begun to occur amongst the planning team for the Harlem Renaissance who had not been part of the earlier preparation for our outreach. The survey question asked, "If you are familiar with Union what has been your experience with them?" Members of our team were surprised that the vast majority of responders had felt that Union was either "an amazing church with a lot to offer" or "a warm welcoming congregation with potential". Members of the team began to share that they found this hard to believe, when in fact there were times that they themselves did not share these sentiments as active members of the congregation. This lead to a candid conversation in which team members shared about why they have either struggled with remaining part of the fellowship or why there children had long left the fellowship for other congregations.

Team members shared that ultimately Union Memorial had experienced what I am calling "generational flight", an instance where the vast majority of a generation or the generation as a whole departs the church leaving no one to pick up the baton and carry on the work of the faith community. When this occurs you have congregations that are top heavy with seasoned saints, who are unable to serve in the way they did when

they were more youthful and no younger people present to support the existing foundation of the church. Consequently, as the older members continue to age and ultimately pass on the church has an inability to sustain itself and heads closer toward its collective demise. One member shared that,

My kids felt this was a very cold church...not inviting. They felt that when they came into the sanctuary everything was so strict and that folks didn't want them to walk, live, or do anything. This was in comparison to a church in North Carolina that they visited during the summers. They are now 36, 38 and 44. They joined other churches...AME and others denominations where they actively serve in leadership positions.

When asked when they left, the response was “shortly after they went away to college”. She shared that, “they would come back occasionally, but it was clear that they were definitely seeking spiritual growth and development elsewhere and it wasn't long before they found it.” Thus, her children have been gone from Union close to twenty years and then some. They are now parents so not only has the church missed out on these possible contributions to the faith community, but it is already starting to miss out on what their children had to offer as well. This creates a ripple affect where generations are not being replenished; they are being demolished over basic things that can be fixed with a willing spirit in the congregation. Another women seconded the concerns stating,

I had a child at a young age, but when my daughter became a teenager, she noticed that most of peers were already leaving church because it had little to offer them. My daughter didn't want to be the only young person so took a break from church until she got to college and started going with peers, which gave her others in her age group to share the experience with.

Children attract other children and teenagers attract other teenagers. The first thing young people notice about a congregation is whether or not there is anyone there like them, whom they can have shared experiences with. It is hard coming to church when you are the only person in high school and everyone else is thirty years or more older

than them. The lack of others to share these formative faith experiences causes young people to feel as though all eyes are on them and they have to get it right or there will be consequences. This is the type of pressure that also causes young people to flee. They can be made feel like the entire future of the church rests on their lone shoulders. This is too much of a burden for anyone to shelter much less our youth and young adults.

The debrief session continued with us revisiting the survey. As we sought to improve ourselves as a faith community, we thought it best to know what type of congregation people in our neighborhood who weren't connected to a faith community where actually looking for. The individuals who responded to the survey were actually pretty divided on what they wanted, which goes to show that we have to have a wide range of offerings. It cannot be the same scripted program every week. While there were some who wanted a "traditional old school feel...the way they grew up" others still want "a new age experience that was more that Sunday morning...with less of the fancy stuff". A good portion still felt that "awesome spirited worship" was the basic premise of what they needed to carry them through the rest of the week.

Our debrief session concluded with feedback on how we planned and implemented the event. A big consensus was that our advertising for the even needed to be done earlier than the two weeks we had. Team members wanted to look at ways in which we could better utilize social media to get the word out as well as print, television and radio so that people were being exposed to the event dates and can plan accordingly to be in attendance. It was further expressed that since we collected contact information from a number of attendees, that we should be in regular dialogue with them to build relationship and also to get their expertise on ways to improve the event the next time and

reach pockets of the neighborhood that did not participate the first time around. The fact that members of the team were in agreement without having to be asked about the “next time around” was very encouraging. Dialogue began about the fall being the time to begin reaching out to the city to secure permits, support and other resources as well as contact potential vendors and artist to perform. The idea of getting out in the community although met with some trepidation at first was enough to get folks moving and ultimately provide them with the experience where they realize not only is it an imperative, but that which brings their faith journey to life.

Conclusion

At the start of this journey my hope was to help individuals within my context pull back the layers of their existence and take long honest looks into the mirrors of their lives for the purpose of come to terms with who they really are individually. As the congregation was willing to engage in this “mirror work” individually, I believed that the faith community as a whole would begin to see commonalities between themselves as members of the community as large. It was my belief that this would then position them mentally and emotionally to be at place where they could assess there practices as a faith community and how they interacted with the community beyond the church’s walls to better understand the disconnect that was present between the entities. Furthermore, the church’s lingering desire to faithfully and successfully carry out it’s mission of “seeking, serving and standing in solidarity with its neighbors” could begin without any unnecessary imposed barriers in the way.

While I believe that there is still a great deal of work to do, critical seeds have not only been planted, cultivated and begun to take root in the hearts, minds and spirits of our members and the surrounding community. They will however, need to be continuously nurtured until they reach a place of maturity where they are able to sustain themselves over time by bearing fruit which motivates continue growth and development amongst each entity. This will be the work that helps to shift the church from simply being a building with a high-steeple and symbol for those who don't dwell therein as an ideal lifestyle which is too lofty to obtain or a self-perceived oasis of perfection. This will be the work that helps to shift the community from simply being a place of ills and issues with no hope insight or self-perceived bastion of struggle and strife with little or no help from those who claim to have it all together. This will be the work that stops the use of derogatory, disassociated language such as "them" or "those people" and opens the eyes of all to see one another in the way that God sees them, which is as God's children who are inextricably tied to one another because of shared value and interdependency on each other for respectively held gifts and graces that go unknown without intentional interaction. This will be the work that stops the community from being a place where churchgoers visit on Sunday mornings for worship and Wednesday nights for bible study or choir rehearsal. This will be the work that stops the church from being the unwanted patrons that take up our parking wake us up earlier than we plan with their loud organ and drums. This will be the work that finally allows each entity to see one another as the same come together for a revitalization that is mutually beneficial and undeniably essential to both of their continued vitality over time.

Seeing Many in Our Mirror as a whole began some tough, long overdue dialogue with the people of Union Memorial United Methodist Church. While the Harlem Renaissance help to re-establish some tarnished, disjointed and otherwise uncharted relationship with the church and community there were some challenges that I believe severely impacted our ability to be more successful than we were. They major hindrance to this project was a two and a half month physical displacement from our building. We were not physically able to be in our building due to fire and destruction of our furnace. Thus, in the winter a building without heat essentially become an icehouse. Members were not even inclined to come out for worship much less a project that required them to have extra hours in the building beyond what they were normally use to having. Thus, many events were reschedule or cancelled altogether, thus limit the congregations overall interaction with the community and our team's ability to gain information for our continue analysis of the work which needed to be embarked upon. We shared worship space with another congregation some ten miles away, which further supported the very problem we were trying to fix, a lack of presence in the community. And while, we were gone there were still a vast majority of community residents who had no idea we weren't in the building for the eleven weeks were gone. However, there was a shred of hope that this work needed to continue. A Hispanic family, which was new to the neighborhood shared with me while entering the building one-day that "they had grown concerned due to our lack of presence in recent weeks." As I shared this with members of our team, it was the source of encouragement needed to motivate us to continue our efforts, because there may very well be people in need of what we have to offer and vice versa, whom we had never considered up to this point. The second issue that impacted our ability to be

successful was time. It goes without saying that a project of this magnitude does not begin to see results over night and so time is needed to see the transformation that is desired across the board. The constant postponing of events that were part of the projects initial time line required several revisions of the original schedule and some items have to be scrapped altogether to complete the work in an allotted time frame for doctoral work. With that being said, the team is in the process of rescheduling events for the continued collection of data and the deepening of relationships with members of the community that have been established over the past few months.

This is extremely important work in a day and time when more and more church are being perceived as irrelevant by the communities in which they physically reside. Many of the communities are desperate for change and looking for partners who perceive a vested interested to reach and help them bring this change to past. This is a not going to be easy, however it can be a potentially win-win situation for the church and community as a whole.

My work thus, far has shown me that there are several key things that must take place in order to see high-steeple churches transform into community revitalization centers. They include but are not limited to the following:

Revival: What is it that Creates Excitement?

We must understand that everyone in our community is not going to come to our Sunday morning worship experience. While we believe that this is where they need to be, it can't be the only means by which we as the church seek to be in relationship with the surrounding community. We must ask the question, "what is it that creates excitement

for people; not church people or community people, but people across the board and be willing to try something that may not be conventional church activities?” In another words, we who are members of the church must be honest about the fact that we don’t have bible study every moment of the day. There are some things that we enjoy doing beyond the four walls that can be opportunities for us to enjoy the company of one another and get to know each other better.

As we seek to identify these activities we don’t have to look far. Music is the universal language that we all speak. Bringing people together around music to dance the popular line dances or participate in the recent challenges on social media to see who can master choreography from the latest dance crazes is a way to have fun and exciting bridging the gap between church and community. People are much more health conscious these days. Bringing people together around a day of fitness that may include a 5K run or walk through the community is a way that people can connect and break down the barriers that presently exist between church and community. Whatever the activity is, it should be something that includes people across a broad spectrum regardless of age, physical ability or anything else that might limit people from having as much fun as the possibly can. Once you have created excitement and established a common the possibilities are endless.

Reintroduction: Who Are We At Our Core?

Once individuals see that people share a common interest, they are most inclined to want to get to know one another. Reintroduction is essential in building meaningful relationships for the purpose bringing church and community together as one. Often

times there are preconceived notions that have developed over some about who individuals or groups are based on surface level interaction. In other words, you may see someone walking fast to his or her car and assume that they don't want to chance speaking to you. The reality may be that they are running extremely late to an appointment and don't know what other obstacles they might face along the way. We too often judge individuals without knowing them and use that as the premise for why we can't be in relationships with them. We must be willing to give one another the benefit of the doubt. We must find out their names and then engage in meaningful dialogue with one another to find out who they are at their core.

Conversation can be difficult, especially if you don't believe you have anything in common. Yet, coming together around the table and sharing a common meal can bring a lot out of people. A Community Chat & Chew will allow individuals to get to another each on a more personal level such as, how long they have lived in the neighborhood, how long they have been members of the church and other personal interests that may not be shared through a basic hello exchanged by simply walking down they street. A Community game of "I Identify", where a statement is read aloud and all who agree or disagree with a statement form a group and begin to have discussion about why they agree or disagree. Through taking the time to have conversations, you learn people's identity and acknowledge similarities that will prove to be the basis for continued interaction.

Reawakening: What Are The Needs of the Players?

Once you have created excitement and gotten to know people, the initial groundwork has been laid for trust to be established and people feel more comfortable sharing what is on their hearts. This is where people began to clearly articulate their needs or in other words what they are craving to enhance their overall quality of life. This is when individuals begin to lay their cards on the table. This is where the church and community can begin to express the obstacles that may be hindering them from being all that they desire to be. This is a critical moment because it is where the mission, what the entities exists to do or bring out will be derived from.

Everyone has a need and the ability of one another to be able to meet that need or help in the process is the next level in establishing meaning partnerships that can exceed all parties expectations if folks are willing to be fully transparent and to a certain degree dependent on one another. A survey or questionnaire can be developed that poles the community on what areas they feel need the most attention. A similar survey or questionnaire can be provided to the congregation that allows them to communicate what their areas of interest are to determine where their skill set or gifts might be best utilized.

Rekindling: Who Can We Be To Each Other?

At this point, with a clear trust established, needs and skills out in the open, a declaration of intention must be articulated by the church and community. In other words one party must be able to say, “In light of you needing this and my ability to provide this, I am willing to do the following.” This essentially becomes the terms by which the relationship now operates. It is not the only extent of the relationship but it clarifies

bother parties expectations and decreases the chances that any form of ambiguity will arise in the future as to what each party is providing the other.

This agreement should be formalized in a special way. If not it can fall apart at anytime and a devastating impact on the relationship that in some cases may not be repairable. While writing up a contract may seem a bit to formal for bridging the gap between churches and the community, it can provided a written explanation that both parties can always go back to in order to ensure everyone is holding up their end of the bargain. One way of formalizing this might be to have special ceremony solidifying the covenant during Sunday morning worship or at an agreed upon time that will maximize the attendance of as large of population from each entity as possible.

Re-envisioning: What Can We Do Together?

The conversation about the revitalization of the community can't be had by the church simply saying, "We'll do this" and the community saying, "We'll do that". Strategic planning must occur where each entity comes to the table and lays out their ideas about what they would like to see the new landscape of the community look like and discuss ways that will help bring this to pass. This may be the time where people who may not be directly connected to the community come into play as support in this transformation effort.

Through re-envisioning the seeds of hope begin to be planted in the community at-large. This is a good opportunity to get as many people on board by producing publications that inform individuals about the plans for a brighter day and how their assistance and ensure the project is a success. This the time to lay out your vision for

other players such as government officials, agencies, businesses and others who have a vested interest in your community to see what they can do to help whatever you envision to become a reality. This is also prime time to start looking for investors that may be willing to fund or underwrite your endeavors. Everything has a price tag and to alleviate financial concerns from your planning early on will help people to approach the endeavor with more of a positive attitude about the endeavor's potential success.

Regroup- Where Can We Have the Greatest Impact

The momentum will build quickly but you don't want it to become a runaway train that goes off the tracks and never reaches the intended destination. This is why it is critical that once all the information is on the table, a serious decision be made as to where the church and community can make the greatest impact. There are dozens of problems facing our communities. It is understandable that everyone who cares will want to see all the problems solved, but you must remain they didn't arrive overnight and they won't leave overnight so it is best that the church and community not take on too much at once so as not to become overwhelmed and lose focus.

It is imperative that the issues be prioritized and then addressed systematically with the understanding that everything will eventually be touched. If the biggest issue is that the children have nothing to do after they get out of school then the group doesn't need to be pushing a feeding program for the hungry unless the problems are one and the same (i.e. the children are standing on the corner because they are hungry). There needs to be a clear focus and everyone must be on board with providing time, energy and resources to address the issue at hand. If the children have nothing to do, a timeline

should be created from the time they get out of school until when darkness begins to fall in the event that will keep them occupied. This may mean an after school program that has tutoring to help them complete their homework, a mentoring program that helps them building a meaningful relationship with someone outside their home, a fitness component that allows them burn off excess energy, a skill component that teaches them something such as an instrument or a trade, and a food component so they don't go home hungry, etc.

Resurgence: What Is Need to Keep It Going

Everything has a life cycle, but revitalization doesn't have to every die. It is incumbent upon the church and the community to check in regularly with each other and name each of the factors that needs additional attention so that things don't fall by the way side. It is easy for everyone to grow complacent when things are going well, when the original area of concern has finally been addressed and doesn't seem to be a problem any more. This is the time to set measures in place for ensuring that the project will be well staffed and that existing leaders and their volunteers don't get tired or burnt out. It is the time to make sure that any support that was received from outside entities has a contingency plan for when those resources are no longer available. When at all possible the church and community must stay two or more steps ahead because there is always a problem on the horizon and you never want hiccups to occur with your existing solution that will cause you to have delay even getting to the next issue.

When people appear to be getting to comfortable, bring them together with an event that celebrates your newfound unity and the progress you have made together.

Commemorate the journey with an annual event that not only looks back at how far you have come but point to the next destination and charters a path forward on the heels of feelings of accomplishment. Let folks see that their work was not in vain and it is even more necessary for the next task ahead.

Final Thoughts

Churches for generations were at the center of our communities. While we have more churches in our communities than ever before, their impact is slim to none. They have turned themselves inward and maintain their need for continued existence only by those who fill their pews on Sunday mornings forgetting there is a community they have to return to once the worship experience is over. The community sees the church as a relic providing no real assistance to the residents because they are so disconnected that they are out of touch with the ever present realities that are plaguing the people in houses within walking distance from the church bell, which tolls every Sunday morning. Consequently the community sees the church and its members merely as a waste of space filled with people who preach a Gospel they are too afraid or self-serving to seek out.

I believe that God has called us to do more and it must start by seeing one another in our mirrors. We must look into the mirrors of our lives and see that at our core, we are all the same. The narratives, which make up our respective stories, may vary from time to time, but they all intersect. We as the church and community must be willing to meet each other at the intersection of hope and healing going from corner to corner seeing ourselves in every person we meet and working together until transformation occurs one street and house household at a time. As Dr. King stated,

Therefore, I am not yet discouraged about the future. Granted that the easygoing optimism of yesterday is impossible. Granted that we face a world crisis, which leaves us standing so often amid the surging murmur of life's restless sea. But every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities. It can spell either salvation or doom. In a dark, confused world the Kingdom of God may yet reign in the hearts of men.¹

It our job as the people of God to see each other not only in our mirrors but also in our hearts, thus providing the critical process for revitalization will be realized for generations to come.

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr. *Strength to Love*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963, p. 154.

APPENDIX A

HARLEM RENAISSANCE PICTURES

The Official Harlem Renaissance Banner





Members of the Union Memorial UMC getting set up for the event



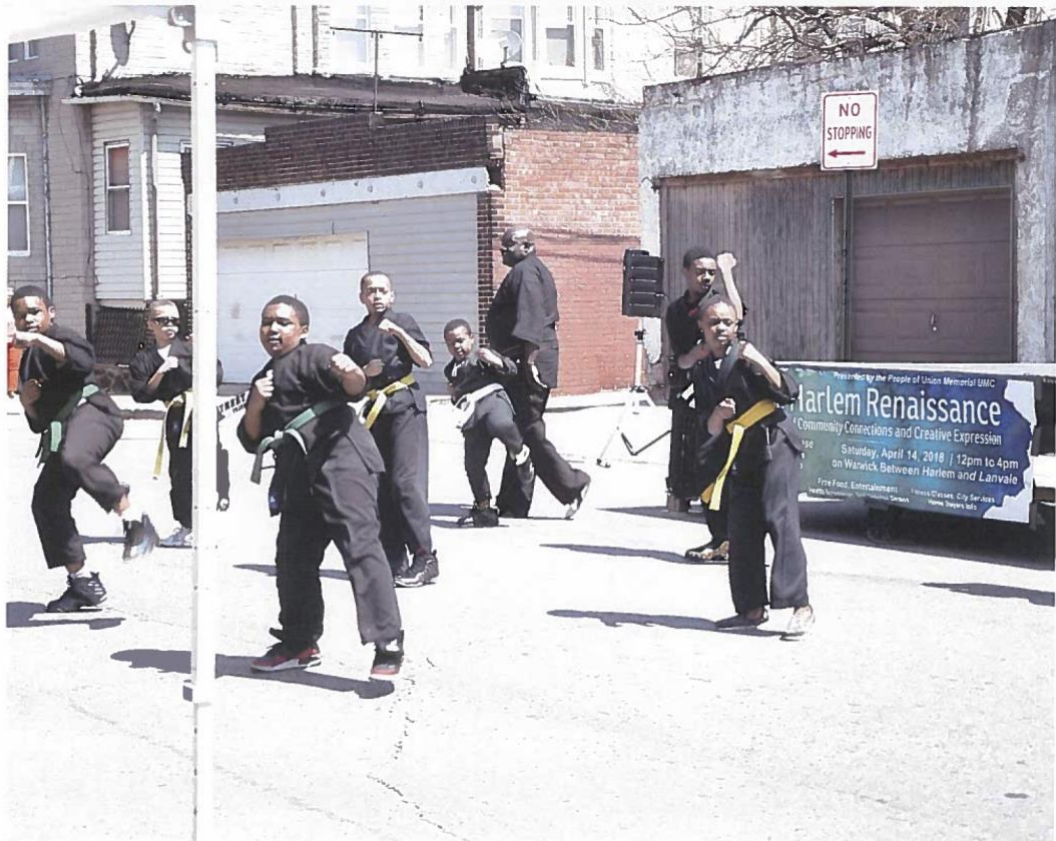
Pastor J's friends, Raymond Johnson and Kevin Hammack and his brother-in-law, Michael White, Jr. and who volunteered as cooks for the Harlem Renaissance



Serving food to members of the community and participants



Community members watching one of the presentations from the day



A karate demonstration



The marching band setting the atmosphere for the day



Pastor Jason posing with some of the young people from the marching band and community



Baltimore City Council Representative John Bullock and his sons bringing greeting to the community



Pastor Jason, Minister Nadine and Bishop Blackwell



The Union Memorial Mass Choir ministering through song



Community members posing for pictures with Harlem Renaissance Team Member, Samontra Brightful



Harlem Renaissance Team Member, Clorie Tildon surveying a community member



Harlem Renaissance Team Members Cynthia Winkler, Helen Copeland and Brenda Pittman



Pastor J and his wife Lady Sherron Jordan-Griffin



Members of Union Memorial UMC and the Harlem Renaissance Team closing out the day with a group picture



The Official Harlem Renaissance Project Logo

APPENDIX B**SEEING MANY IN OUR MIRRORS QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS**

**SEEING MANY IN OUR MIRRORS
QUESTIONNAIRE**

Are you connected with a faith community?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

Are you an active member?

- ☐ **Attend regularly and involved with ministries**
- ☐ **Go when I can and participate occasionally**
- ☐ **Haven't been in a long time...I guess I'm still connected**

Are you familiar with Union Memorial UMC?

- ☐ **Yes, I have worshipped there or been to an activity**
- ☐ **Not really but I know where they are located**
- ☐ **No never heard of the place before**

If you are familiar with Union what has been your experience with them?

- ☐ **Amazing church with a lot to offer me**
- ☐ **Warm welcoming congregation with potential**
- ☐ **Work needs to be done to make me feel at home**
- ☐ **Not the place for me, lacking basic needs**

What do you look for in a church?

- ☐ **Awesome spirited worship and I'm good for the week**
- ☐ **I need the extras like bible study, women's and men's fellowship, choir and more**
- ☐ **Traditional old school feel...the way I grew up on church**
- ☐ **New age experience where more than just Sunday, come as you are without a lot of fancy stuff**

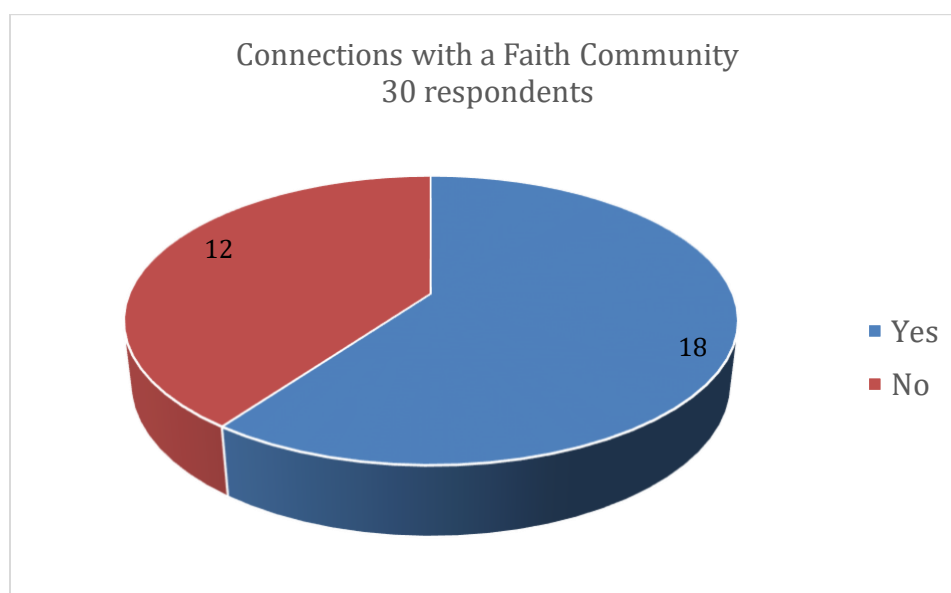
What would make you want to be connected to Union Memorial?

- ☐ **The People**
- ☐ **The Worship**
- ☐ **Activities**
- ☐ **Outreach**
- ☐ **Other_____**

SEEING MANY IN OUR MIRRORS RESULTS

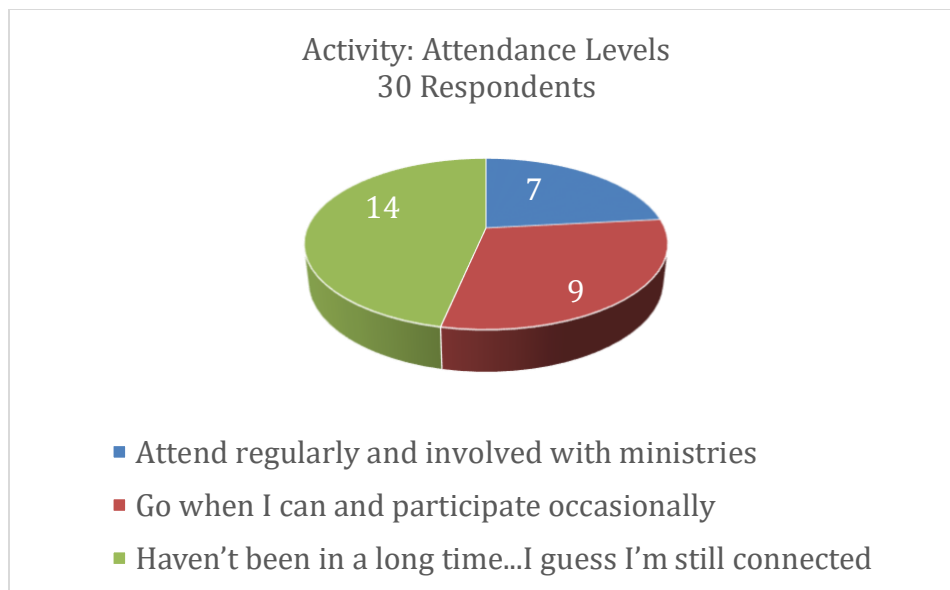
Are you connected with a faith community?

- **Yes 18**
- **No 12**



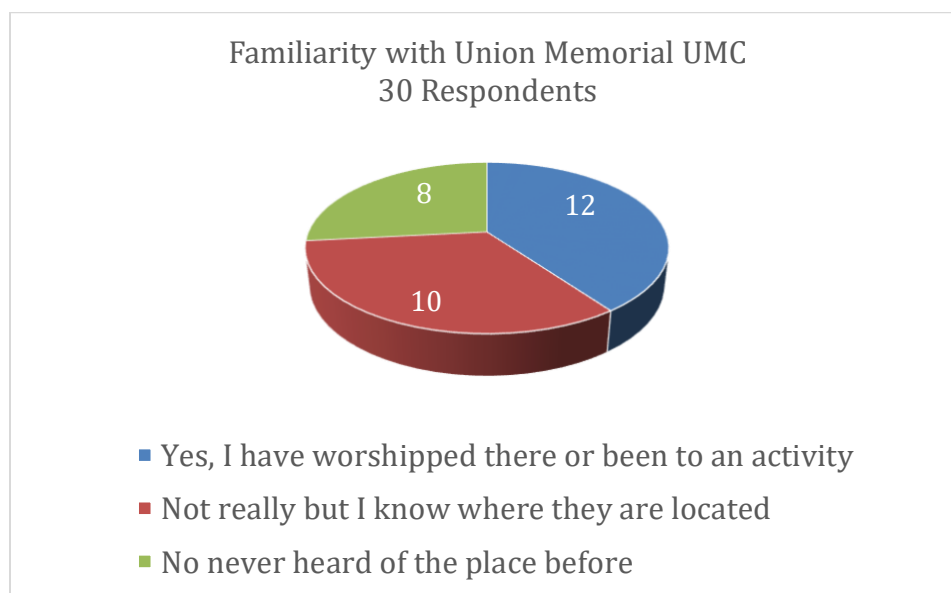
Are you an active member?

- **Attend regularly and involved with ministries 7**
- **Go when I can and participate occasionally 9**
- **Haven't been in a long time...I guess I'm still connected 14**



Are you familiar with Union Memorial UMC?

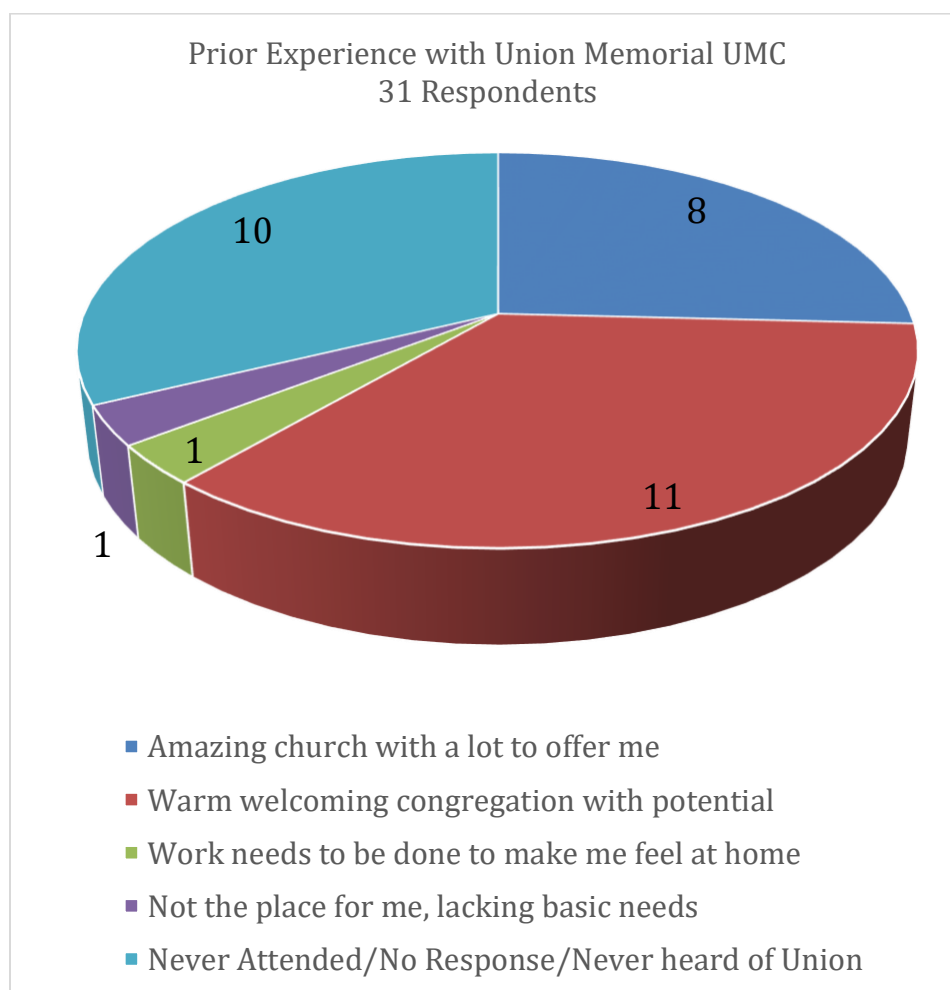
- **Yes, I have worshipped there or been to an activity 12**
- **Not really but I know where they are located 10**
- **No never heard of the place before 8**



If you are familiar with Union what has been your experience with them?

- **Amazing church with a lot to offer me 8**
- **Warm welcoming congregation with potential 11**
- **Work needs to be done to make me feel at home 1**
- **Not the place for me, lacking basic needs 1**

10 Chose not to respond due to not attending but knowing where we were or never having heard of us before



What do you look for in a church?

- **Awesome spirited worship and I'm good for the week 9**

- I need the extras like bible study, women's and men's fellowship, choir and more
- Traditional old school feel...the way I grew up on church **9**
- New age experience where more than just Sunday, come as you are without a lot of fancy stuff **5**

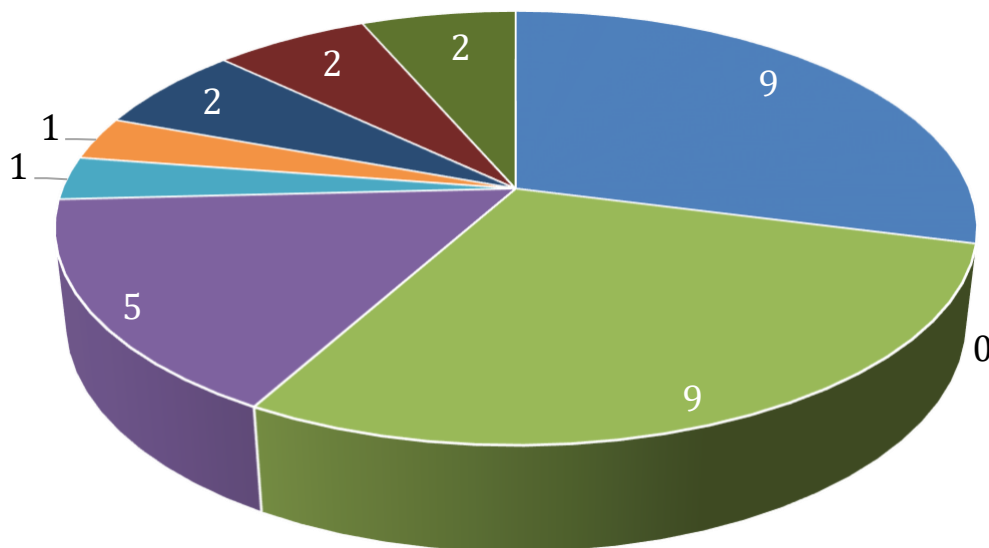
2 Chose not to respond due to unclear reasons

1 Chose a Combination of Extras and New Age (Not Connected)

2 Chose a Combination of Worship and New Age (Not Connected)

2 Chose a Combination of All (Already Connected)

What do you look for in a church?
31 Respondents



- Awesome spirited worship and I'm good for the week
- I need the extras like bible study, women's and men's fellowship, choir and more
- Traditional old school feel...the way I grew up on church
- New age experience where more than just Sunday, come as you are without a lot of fancy stuff
- Combination Extras/New AGE
- Combination Worship/New Age (Not Connected)
- Combination of Worship and New Age (Not Connected)
- Combination of All (Already Connected)
- No response due to unclear reasons

What would make you want to be connected to Union Memorial?

- The People **6**
- The Worship **5**
- Activities **2**
- Outreach **4**
- Other _____

2 Chose a Combination of People and Worship

1 Chose a Combination of Worship and Activities

1 Chose a Combination of Activities and Outreach

3 Chose a Combination of People, Worship and Activities

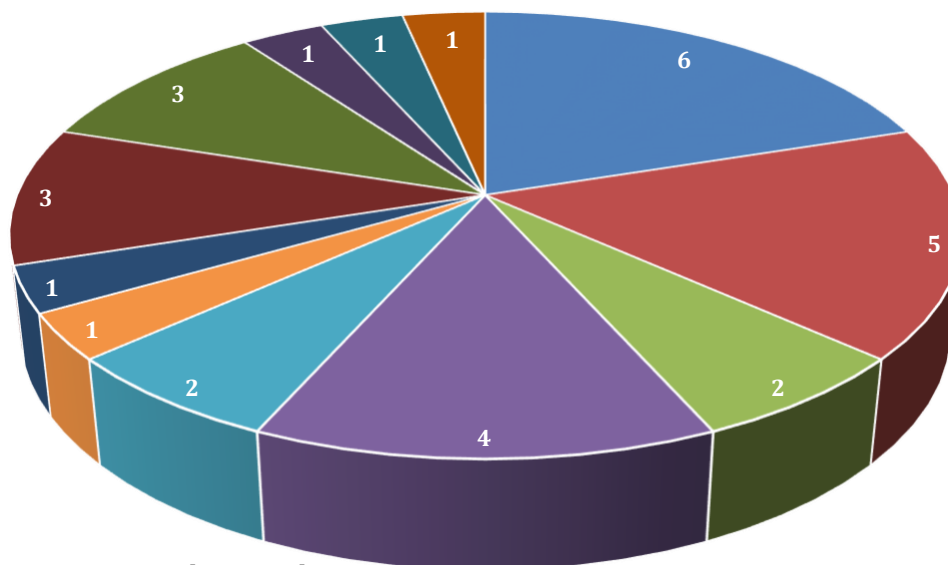
3 Chose a Combination of All

1 Shared Other Activities for Youth

1 Shared Other Men Between the Ages of 50-55

1 Shared Other Listing Religious Affiliations with Ecumenical Opportunities

What would make you want
to connect to Union Memorial
30 Respondents



- The People
- The Worship
- o Activities
- o Outreach 4
- Combination of People and Worship
- Combination of Worship and Activities
- Combination of Activities and Outreach
- Combination of People, Worship and Activities
- Combination of All
- Shared - Other Activities for Youth
- Shared - Other Men Between the Ages of 50-55
- Shared - Other Listing Religious Affiliations with Ecumenical Opportunities

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